
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 March 2020

by James Taylor BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 March 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/W3330/D/19/3242832

The Blade Mill, Woodford Road, Monksilver TA4 4HW

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Alex McTaggart against the decision of Somerset West and Taunton Council.
 - The application Ref 3/24/19/002, dated 8 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 29 October 2019.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a two storey side and rear extension and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matter

2. I have taken the description of the development from the appellant's appeal form because this more succinctly describes the proposal.

Main issue

3. The effect of the proposal on the significance of The Blade Mill, a non-designated heritage asset, and the surrounding area, including the setting of Exmoor National Park.

Reasons

4. The Blade Mill is a two-storey dwelling sited adjacent to a highway and a watercourse. It is a former waterpowered metal workshop, constructed from local stone under a slate roof. It has a simple and utilitarian form reflecting its former use and the local vernacular within this hamlet of dwellings. The property has been included on the Somerset Historic Environment Record since 2016 and is a non-designated heritage asset.
5. The significance of the heritage asset derives from its illustrative historical value and its aesthetic value. These values are evident in the character and appearance of the building, its scale, form and materials and also its relationship to the landscape including roads and rivers. These all relate to its historic use. This can still be clearly appreciated even though it is already converted to a dwelling. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out at paragraph 197 that a balanced judgement is required when assessing proposals that affect the significance of such assets. Regard

should be had to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the asset.

6. The proposed extension would substantially add to the overall mass and scale of this simple rectangular building. The extension would have eaves and ridge heights to match the host building and extend the footprint significantly beyond the existing elevations in two different directions. Consequently, the scale and form of the extensions do not respect the simple utilitarian form and scale of the building. Whilst the extension would be set back from the road and frontage, this element of subservience would not mitigate the harm.
7. Furthermore, the asymmetrical gable to the rear would fail to reflect the existing form, and the lack of corbel details at eaves would not respect the architectural details of the host building. The proposal would substantially increase the amount of fenestration and its visual prominence, particularly on approaches from the west. Whilst most of the openings would match the existing windows on the north-east elevation, they would appear domestic in their proportions, harmful to the character of the building. Consequently, the proposed additions would appear incongruous and fail to respect the form and design of the building and its significance as a non-designated heritage asset.
8. The host building is located on the opposite side of the road to the majority of the development within this small settlement. Therefore, it is distinct and visually prominent on approaches in either direction. The road is the boundary for Exmoor National Park (ENP). As such, the site lies outside, but adjacent to, an area whose landscape and cultural heritage value should be protected and afforded great weight in any planning decisions. This is set out at paragraph 172 of the Framework. Given the harm previously identified to this heritage asset of cultural significance, and the prominent siting and close relationship of the building to ENP, the proposals would also cause harm to the setting of the National Park. However, one additional rooflight would not result in any demonstrable light pollution.
9. In conclusion, the proposal would harm the significance of The Blade Mill, a non-designated heritage asset, and the surrounding area, including the setting of Exmoor National Park. As such the proposal would be contrary to Policies NH1, NH2 and NH14 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032, adopted November 2016 and paragraphs 172 and 197 of the Framework. These policies seek, amongst other aims to conserve and enhance the built and historic environment and achieve high quality design so as to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and cultural heritage of ENP and its setting.

Other matters

10. The appellant has drawn attention to the historic planning approval¹ at the site. Since that permission was granted, the value of the building as a heritage asset has been recognized through the Somerset Historic Environment Record. This occurred while the historic planning approval remained extant. Whilst material, this timing is not defining, and significantly no development had commenced on implementing the planning approval at that stage. Moreover, the current proposal is different in form, scale and detail compared to the historic planning approval. Furthermore, the permission has lapsed. As such, whilst the historic planning approval is material, it has limited weight.

¹ LPA ref: 3/24/14/001

11. The appellant has raised concerns in regard to inconsistencies between the pre-application advice, the officer report and the Council's formal Decision Notice. However, these do not have any significant weight in the determination of this Appeal Decision. Furthermore, the appellant highlights that the dwelling is small, but there is no evidence that it is unsuitable for modern day living.

Conclusion

12. In summary, the scale of harm to the non-designated heritage asset would be modest and the significance of the asset is equally modest. Furthermore, some modest harm would occur to the setting of the ENP, which the Framework establishes as having great weight. As such, the harm identified is not outweighed by the limited weight associated with elements in favour of the scheme including the historic planning approval.
13. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

James Taylor

INSPECTOR