
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 February 2020 by Hannah Ellison BSc (Hons) MSc

Decision by Brendan Lyons BArch MA MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 March 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/A0665/W/19/3241408

Outbuildings at Monument Place, Stannage Lane, Churton by Aldford, Chester CH3 6LE

- 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 Edward Trevor-Barnston against the decision of Cheshire West & Chester Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00422/FUL, dated 31 January 2019, was refused by notice dated 13 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of barns to form one dwelling with detached garage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by an Appeal Planning Officer whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposed development is consistent with development plan policy relating to the sustainable location of development and the reuse of buildings in the countryside.

Reasons

4. The appeal relates to two agricultural barns located in open fields to the west of the village of Churton, accessed via an overgrown track from Stannage Lane. The smaller of the two barns (hereinafter referred to as Barn 1) is steel framed and clad on all four sides with profiled metal sheeting fixed to timber purlins. The larger barn (Barn 2) has a timber frame with telegraph pole columns. It is also finished in profiled metal sheeting to three sides and is open on its southern/front elevation. This proposal seeks permission to convert Barn 1 into a single dwelling and Barn 2 into an ancillary garage following its partial demolition.
5. Policies STRAT 1 and STRAT 2 of the Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Plan, Part One, Strategic Policies (2015) (the CWCLP1) collectively seek to direct new housing primarily to areas with good accessibility to existing services, specifically in identified settlements in line with a settlement

hierarchy. Churton is not an identified settlement or key service centre, therefore for development plan purposes it falls within a countryside location.

6. Policy STRAT 2 does however note that development will be brought forward in smaller rural settlements which have adequate services and facilities and access to public transport. However, the appeal site lies some way outside the village which, other than a public house, lacks a range of services. Additionally, there is only an infrequent bus service to larger centres. Therefore, development at the appeal site would not accord with the CWCLP1 strategy for a sustainable location for development.
7. Policy STRAT 9 of the CWCLP1 expands on the principles of policies STRAT 1 and STRAT 2. It is a criteria-based policy, setting out the circumstances where development within the countryside will be permitted. The reuse of existing rural buildings, particularly for economic purposes, where buildings are of permanent construction and can be reused without major reconstruction is one of the types of development permitted. Whilst the proposed development is not for economic purposes, the policy does not specifically preclude reuse for residential purposes. However, consideration must be given to the structural condition of the existing building and the degree of construction required to implement the proposal.
8. At the time of my site visit I observed that both barns are in a poor state of repair with missing sections of wall and roof panels to both and a partially collapsed roof to Barn 2. Some of the remaining wall panels appear to have been replaced in a piecemeal manner and are damaged resulting in large gaps through to the barn. There was also a significant degree of vegetation growing within and along the elevation of the barns. It is evident they are not fully weathertight and do not have any methods of insulation.
9. The proposed development is supported by a structural inspection report for both barns. The report concludes that the barns are capable of being re-used and incorporated into the proposed conversion, subject to various work including replacement of steel connections and bolts, reinstatement of structural members and new roof and wall panels. However, I note that the report's conclusion is caveated by the need for further inspections of foundations and steelwork. In the absence of these and with uncertainty over the longitudinal stability of the structure, it is not possible to be sure that Barn 1 is of sufficiently permanent construction to sustain the proposed conversion to habitable accommodation. The report also states that the failure of the roof of Barn 2 is probably due to the removal of a column and that the building has been damaged by fire. Because of that, and the lack of certainty over foundations and stability, the building cannot be regarded as of suitably permanent construction.
10. Even if the main frame were found suitable, Barn 1 would require a completely new roof and external walls, including many large glazed openings, as well as the internal walls and floor needed for the proposed living accommodation. Insulation would also be required. Barn 2 would require substantial demolition, a new roof supported by some new structural elements and new external walls. Both barns would be finished with new external cladding. Taking this into consideration, along with concerns over the condition of both barns, there is no doubt in my mind that little of the original barns would be retained with this proposal and there would be major reconstruction in each case.

11. The appeal seeks to make a comparison with a recent planning permission granted by the Council¹ which involved the conversion of former stables to habitable accommodation. Based on the evidence before me, that conversion appears to utilise many of the existing partitions and openings, and the external cladding and brickwork would be retained. It is acknowledged that no structural report was submitted with that application, however the photographs and Council's officer report suggest that the buildings are in a good state of repair and are of substantial and permanent construction. Furthermore, it is evident that the stables hold some historical and architectural significance as they are allocated as a non-designated heritage asset, and it was therefore found that the conversion would conserve them from decay, destruction or demolition. Accordingly, I do not find the context or circumstances of this approval to be directly comparable. In any event, this appeal has been determined on its own merits and the condition of the barns and extent of alterations proposed are factors which have been taken into account.
12. Therefore, taking all the above into consideration, the proposal would not be consistent with development plan policy relating to the sustainable location of development and the reuse of buildings in the countryside as it would conflict with policies STRAT 1, STRAT 2 and STRAT 9 of the CWCLP1.

Other Matters

13. I accept that this proposal would improve the appearance of the existing barns. However, the creation of a domestic curtilage with associated domestic paraphernalia would nevertheless be harmful to the character of the countryside. This would outweigh the improved visual appearance of the barns, and therefore limits the weight which I afford this matter.
14. It has been suggested that the village would benefit from a new family dwelling however I am not aware of any shortfall in housing supply. Nevertheless, any social or economic benefits of the proposal would be limited due to the small scale of the proposed development.

Conclusion and Recommendation

15. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, I recommend that the appeal is dismissed.

Hannah Ellison

Appeal Planning Officer

Inspector's Decision

16. I have considered all the submitted evidence and the Appeal Planning Officer's report and on that basis the appeal is dismissed.

Brendan Lyons

INSPECTOR

¹ Sandy Brow Stables, Tarporley Road, Delamere, Northwich, CW6 9EG. Application Number: 18/00077/FUL