
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 March 2020

by Diane Cragg DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/P4415/W/19/3240646

80 Common Road, Thorpe Salvin, Rotherham S80 3JJ

- 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 D Bonsall against the decision of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref RB2019/1246, dated 31 July 2019, was refused by notice dated 14 October 2019.
 - The development proposed is change of use of agricultural barn to dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. I am aware from the evidence before me of the appeal site's extensive planning and enforcement history. However, whilst I have had regard to the history of the site in determining this section 78 appeal any extant enforcement issues are separate to my consideration of this appeal, which is based on the planning merits of the specific proposal before me.
3. The proposed development is the change of use of the agricultural building to a dwelling. The use requires alterations to the building. The alterations are part of the scheme and are shown on drawing no 1347 SK_09 and SK_10. The drawings indicate the proposed internal arrangement and the position of new windows. I saw at my site visit that some works have been undertaken. Notwithstanding those works which have taken place at the site to date, I have considered the appeal on the basis of the proposal as shown on the submitted drawings. I have been provided with drawing no.SK_06 which identifies the existing elevations of the building and I have taken the building as shown on that drawing to represent the existing building in coming to my decision. Any subsequent reference to the existing building in my decision is to the building as shown on that drawing.
4. The appellant indicates in his appeal statement a willingness to tile the roof and stone clad the walls of the building. However, such works would notably alter the form of the development compared with that which is shown on the submitted drawings, and on which the Council based its decision. If I were to determine the appeal based on these amendments it is possible that the interests of parties who might wish to comment would be prejudiced. The Procedural Guide Planning Appeals – England March 2020 sets out in paragraph M.2.1 that, 'If an appeal is made the appeal process should not be used to

evolve a scheme and it is important that what is considered by the Inspector is essentially what was considered by the local planning authority, and on which interested people's views were sought'. I have therefore determined the appeal based on the development as shown on those drawings listed above, consistent with the Council's decision.

5. Paragraph 146 d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) outlines that the re-use of buildings, provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction, is not inappropriate in the Green Belt. This is provided the development preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Policy SP5 of the Rotherham Local Plan Sites and Policies adopted June 2018 (Local Plan Sites and Policies) is similarly worded.
6. The parties agree that the existing building is of permanent and substantial construction, that the development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would not conflict with Green Belt purposes. Consequently, both parties consider that the development would be 'not inappropriate' development in the Green Belt. Based on the evidence before me and my site visit, I agree, and I conclude that the proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Main Issues

7. Therefore, having regard to the above the main issues are:
 - The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - Whether the appeal site is a suitable location for residential development having regard to the accessibility of services and facilities.

Reasons

Character and appearance

8. The appeal site comprises of a detached breeze block building located in a wooded area in the open countryside beyond the village of Thorpe Salvin. Immediately adjacent to the appeal site is an equestrian business with a car park to the road frontage and a number of stable and storage buildings associated with that use set back from the road. The area is characterised by mainly open grazing and pastureland with small wooded areas and a limited number of buildings generally associated or formerly associated with agricultural related uses. The wooded areas are prominent features of the landscape due to the open pastureland and the generally open and undeveloped nature of the area.
9. Policy SP55 of the Local Plan Sites and Policies seeks to ensure that developments are of a high quality and contribute to the character and distinctiveness of the area and the way it functions. This is consistent with the Framework which similarly promotes good design; seeking to ensure that development will function well and add to the overall quality of the area over the lifetime of the development. The National Design Guide supports the Framework by advising that development should respond to its context.

10. At my site visit I noted that on the approach to the site from Thorpe Salvin the wooded area within which the building is situated draws attention because of its contrast with the otherwise open setting. In that context, although the building is likely to be largely hidden by the surrounding landscaping for much of the year, I observed that glimpses of the appeal building are nonetheless visible on the approach to the site from Thorpe Salvin, and that, closer to the site, the building is also visible above the hedge fronting Common Road.
11. The details before me indicate that the existing building had very few openings, an appearance consistent with its functional character as an agricultural building. The proposed development would introduce a significant number of new windows and doors. The size and placement of the openings in a typical domestic arrangement, together with their design and materials, would be alien to the building's utilitarian form, and would significantly change the intrinsic agricultural character of the building. The proposed development would therefore represent a discordant domestic form of development which would cause material harm to the character and appearance of the building and the surrounding countryside. Due to the works that have already been implemented, which appear to closely reflect the appeal scheme, I saw at my site visit that these aspects of the design would be visible in the landscape, and from public vantage points on Common Road, even if only to a limited extent.
12. The proposed scheme includes the retention of the existing steel sheet roof and indicates that the building would be rendered. During my site visit I noted that there is some variety of materials in the area. I see no reason why steel sheet roofing would be unacceptable for a dwelling. However, on a building of this size and in this location, separate from other buildings and surrounded by trees within open countryside, I consider that the exclusive use of render with its smooth clean lines would create a greater contrast with the surrounding landscape setting and increase the visibility of the building. This contrast would further exacerbate the unduly domestic appearance of the building in its context and add to my concerns in this regard.
13. The appellant suggests additional planting to replace the driveway. I appreciate that such landscaping may ultimately result in the building being less visible, however, placing reliance on landscaping, which may, in any event be removed or cut back over time, to shield otherwise unacceptable development would not support the policy objectives of achieving high quality development and good design.
14. The appellant highlights that the recommencement of the agricultural activity would result in landscaping being removed and the site access being widened. Be that as it may, agricultural activity, and associated works and paraphernalia, are not unusual or uncharacteristic in rural locations such as this, and such matters do not alter my conclusions regarding the particular harm to character and appearance that would arise as a result of the domestic appearance of the development proposed in this case.
15. Although there are equestrian buildings near the site the appeal building is visually separate from the equestrian use. The Council refer to the building being isolated. Paragraph 79 of the Framework indicates that isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided except in certain circumstances, including where development would reuse redundant or disused buildings (Paragraph 79c). However, even were I to accept that the development would re-use a

redundant building in an isolated location, it would not meet the additional requirement of paragraph 79c to enhance its immediate setting.

16. Overall, I consider that the proposed alterations to the building to form a dwelling would harm the character and appearance of the area and would conflict with Policy SP55 of the Local Plan Sites and Policies. In this respect the development would also conflict with the Framework.

Accessibility

17. Policy CS14 of the Rotherham Local Plan Core Strategy 2013- 2028 adopted September 2014 (Cores Strategy) seeks to locate new development in highly accessible locations such as town and district centres or on key bus corridors which are well served by a variety of modes of travel (but principally by public transport) and by enabling walking and cycling to be used for shorter trips and for links to public transport interchanges. The Framework is broadly consistent with the approach of Policy CS14 which promotes sustainable development in rural areas, including by requiring housing to be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.
18. The appeal site is several hundred metres beyond the village of Thorpe Salvin. Moreover, there are very limited services and facilities within Thorpe Salvin. Future occupiers would therefore need to travel further afield to meet their basic daily needs.
19. Common Road for much of its length is a relatively narrow lane with no footpaths or lighting. I observed that the road is only lightly trafficked and on foot or by bicycle, in principle, it may be possible to reach the village and utilise the bus service. However, I would not consider the route to be a short or convenient walk and its limited width and the absence of footpaths or lighting would, I consider, serve to discourage future occupants from walking or cycling, particularly at night. The route to Kiveton Park Railway Station is further and on similar country roads. The Railway Station is also unlikely to be a convenient walk or cycle ride, particularly during the hours of darkness. Therefore, given the distances involved, the limitations of the immediate rural roads and the relatively limited range of facilities in Thorpe Salvin, it is likely that most of the trips to access work, schools and leisure facilities would be by car.
20. Therefore, future occupiers would be heavily reliant on private car journeys. The proposal would not encourage sustainable forms of transport and the need to travel would not be minimised in this location. Nor would the single dwelling proposed make a notable contribution to sustainable development in rural areas through supporting local services in a village nearby, as promoted by the Framework. I have nothing before me by way of substantive evidence to indicate that the development would be necessary for a rural worker, or that it would meet a specific identified community need and I have found that the development would not enhance the immediate setting of the building. Therefore, although the Framework may make provision for the re-use of buildings in the Green Belt in principle, I conclude that, in relation to the use of the existing building as a dwelling, the requirements of the Framework concerning the location of rural housing would not be met, and the development would therefore conflict with the Framework as a whole.

21. Policy SP5 of the Local Plan Sites and Policies makes provision for the change of use of buildings in the Green Belt. However, the supporting text to that policy nonetheless states that alternative uses will need to meet the requirements of other policies, appropriate to the use proposed, within the Local Plan. That supporting text echoes the requirements of Policy SP2, which deals more generally with development in the Green Belt. In this instance, for the reasons given and having regard to the particular circumstances of the appeal site I conclude that the appeal site is not a suitable location for residential development, having regard to the accessibility to services and facilities. The proposed development would therefore conflict with Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy and with the overall aims of the Framework as set out above, and thus also with the requirements set out in Policy SP2 of the Local Plan Site and Policies and echoed in the supporting text of Policy SP5.

Other Matters

22. The appellant references an appeal further from the village than the appeal site. However, on the basis of the limited information before me, there appear to have been differences in the specific nature of development and in some of the main issues in that case compared with those in the current appeal. I cannot be certain that the circumstances in that case were directly comparable to those in the appeal before me. I have also been referred to the Council having granted permission for changes of use to residential on other nearby sites. However, on the basis of the very limited information before me, I cannot be certain that the circumstances in those cases were directly comparable to those in the current appeal. In any event I have considered this appeal on its own planning merits.
23. I appreciate that some conversions of agricultural buildings do not need planning permission, however, this is not the case here. Consequently, this does not weigh in favour of the appeal proposal, which I have considered on its planning merits.

Conclusion

24. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Diane Cragg

INSPECTOR