



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 27 October 2020

by T Gethin BA (Hons), MSc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 November 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/20/3256563

Unit 3 & 4 Cambridge Barn, New Portreath Road, Redruth, TR16 4QL

- 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 Mark Hitchen against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA20/02254, dated 11 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 2 June 2020.
 - The development proposed is Reposition of approved extended dwellings known as Unit 3 & 4 Cambridge Barn (PA18/09260) and reposition of existing access track.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

3. Located in the open countryside, the appeal site is situated on a hillside and is visible in the surrounding area. Positioned near to a number of existing buildings, the site contains, amongst other aspects, two single-storey dwellings, known as Units 3 and 4. These are set behind some soft landscaping and a hedge which forms a clear boundary separating the site from the adjoining agricultural field, which has an open and undeveloped rural character.
4. Units 3 and 4 benefit from planning permission for first floor and two storey rear extensions with balconies and internal alterations. The available evidence indicates that the permission remains extant. It seems to me that there is thus a realistic prospect of it being implemented. Accordingly, this represents a realistic fallback position to which I attach substantial weight.
5. The proposed replacement dwellings would have a similar scale, bulk, design and appearance to the approved extended units. However, although there would also be some overlap with the footprint of the existing/approved units and the parking areas and track, they would be positioned further down the hillside and set well forward of the existing/approved units. Noticeably extending residential built form into the field, beyond the hedge and adjacent track, they would therefore be more visually intrusive than the existing and approved units. The proposed gardens and parking spaces would also extend further into the field, well beyond the replacement dwellings and significantly more than the existing and approved situations.

6. Accordingly, the replacement dwellings and associated garden and parking areas would appear as a significant and notable encroachment of the domestic built environment into the open countryside. Visible in the locality, including from the nearby public right of way on the old tramway, the B3300, Old Portreath Road and in the wider valley, the appeal proposal would therefore read as eroding the undeveloped natural landscape character of the surrounding area. The forward position and revised orientation of the replacement dwellings, combined with their conspicuous position on the sloping hillside, would also heighten their visibility and prominence in the locality compared to the existing and the approved situations.
7. In coming to this view, I have taken account of the set down of the replacement dwellings, their lower floor level compared to the approved units, the potential to incorporate a sedum roof, the screening provided by existing soft landscaping and the potential for new planting – which could be secured by condition – to provide further screening. However, these would not significantly reduce their visibility and prominence nor avoid the proposed development from visually and physically extending built form into the open countryside. Given the physical and visual break afforded by the access lane and hedgerow that separates the site from the cottages/chalets to the east, the similar orientation of the replacement dwellings to those buildings does also not lead me to a different conclusion.
8. The evidence before me indicates that a separate application for prior approval for the re-positioned track was refused by the Council. Be that as it may, I observed on my site visit that the track adjacent to the hedge running below the existing units had been partly covered/removed and a new track appeared to have been recently constructed in a similar position to that shown on the submitted proposed site plan. However, irrespective of the lawful status of that track, it is clear to me that the cumulative effect of the repositioned replacement dwellings and their associated garden and parking areas, combined with the re-positioned track, would appear as a significant encroachment of built form into the countryside and as urbanising the undeveloped landscape. This would harm the rural qualities of the area.
9. There are a number of buildings further up the hillside which are larger than the application buildings and I understand that some of them benefit from planning permission, granted at appeal, for extensions and the incorporation of ample south-facing glazing. My attention has also been drawn to various other approved schemes in the locality, including for replacement dwellings significantly larger and not necessarily on the same footprint as the existing buildings. All of these situations and cases are noted, but the evidence before me indicates that the circumstances – including, in particular, their different locations elsewhere on the hillside and one being some distance away in a different settlement – are sufficiently at variance that I have judged this appeal proposal on its own merits.
10. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area. I therefore find that it conflicts with CLP Policies 7, 12 and 23. Amongst other aspects, these require replacement dwellings to be of an appropriate scale and character to their location and to sustain and enhance Cornwall's distinctive natural and landscape character. The proposal would also be inconsistent with: the provisions in the National Planning Policy Framework in relation to achieving

well-designed places and conserving and enhancing the natural environment; and the guidance in the Cornwall Design Guide in relation to development integrating with the surrounding area and respecting its characteristics.

Other matters

11. My attention has been drawn to another application for planning permission to re-orientate the units but siting them over the existing footprint, and which the Council recently invalidated due to an issue associated with the location plan submitted with that application. I also note that the Cornwall Mining World Heritage Site Office and the Portreath Parish Council did not object to the proposed development. However, these matters are not determinative as to the acceptability of the appeal proposal, which I have determined on its merits.
12. The replacement dwellings would be relocated away from the steep bank and neighbouring property to the north-west and the nearby track and access lane. It has been put to me that the proposed development would therefore provide improved amenity, privacy, parking provision and access for occupiers of the site and for users of the neighbouring dwellings, holiday cottages and surrounding land. However, on the basis of the available evidence and given the orientation of the existing and approved units, their degree of separation to surrounding buildings and the separating presence of soft landscaping and boundary treatment, it seems to me that there are no significant issues regarding the safety and living conditions of residents in the existing/approved units and in surrounding properties. The appeal proposal would not therefore result in any obvious benefit in relation to these matters. The evidence before me does also not indicate that the existing albeit limited visibility of the parking spaces and extent of the parking and garden areas of Units 3 and 4 are unacceptable.
13. Given that the re-positioned track appears to have been built, I attach limited weight to the purported safety and access benefits associated with its proposed re-positioning. In any event, I have not been presented with any compelling evidence which demonstrates that the previous situation involved an unacceptable setup with respect to safety of pedestrians and vehicles.
14. For the reasons above and on the basis of the nature and scale of the proposed development, I am satisfied that the benefits of the appeal proposal would be relatively limited. Consequently, the harm I have identified, which could not be overcome by the imposition of planning conditions, is not outweighed by these considerations and is sufficient for me to find against the proposal.

Conclusion

15. For the above reasons, the appeal is dismissed.

T Gethin

INSPECTOR