The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 10 November 2020 by A J Sutton BA Hons DipTP MRTPI

by R C Kirby BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 December 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C1625/W/20/3256075
Land at Church Close, Cranham, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL4 8HT

- 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 Ms Lorna Davies against the decision of Stroud District Council.
- The application Ref S.19/2715/FUL, dated 18 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 11 February 2020.
- The development proposed is erection of self-build dwelling.

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 Issues

3. The appeal site is within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Council concluded the proposed dwelling would be viewed in the context of the rural settlement of Cranham and would therefore not harm the landscape and scenic beauty of the wider AONB. I observed nothing which would lead me to reach an alternative conclusion on this matter.

4. Therefore, the main issues are the effect of the proposed development on the:

   - character and appearance of the area; and
   - living conditions of future occupants of the dwelling, with regards to internal floor space.

Reasons for Recommendation

Character and Appearance

5. The built form in the surrounding area is characterised by dwellings set in modest to large sized plots. The properties forming the immediate setting of the appeal site have modest rear gardens in a linear pattern. The ratio of developed area to garden space within each plot is generally consistent with a sense of space to the front and rear. Whilst the wider settlement pattern appears somewhat irregular in layout, it has a distinct local character, with dwellings set back from the road with principal elevations generally forward facing and with architecture of a traditional style.

6. The appeal site is a small area of hardstanding fronting Church Close and bound on two sides by the rear garden of No 12. The plot size is significantly smaller than nearby residential plots. The proposed dwelling would substantially fill the plot and the principal elevation, entrance and garden space would be orientated to the side. The property would also be set close to the road. As such it would appear extremely cramped within the very restricted plot and would fail to reflect distinct local characteristics in terms of patterns of development and street layout.

7. Whilst the scale of the proposed dwelling would be similar to that of the former garages on the site, reference to the former use would not be readily understood when viewing the predominately solid elevation and mono-pitch roof profile which would front the road. Furthermore, the development would appear an oddity that would lack legibility as a dwelling. Therefore, the oblique design scheme would result in a development which would poorly relate to existing properties in its immediate setting and would not visually integrate when viewed in the wider setting.

8. Contemporary design can provide an interesting contrast with traditional styles of architecture. However, in this case, the proposed design concept would not appear innovative or of a high architectural quality in terms of form or use of materials, so as to justify the proposed incongruous structure in this area.

9. The National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. Planning decisions should ensure that developments are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and are sympathetic to local character and history. The National Design Guide elaborates further, identifying characteristics of good design for all scales of development, which include context, identity and built form. Good design should allow new development to integrate into its surroundings, be attractive and distinctive, and form a coherent pattern of development.

10. Given my findings I conclude that that the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area, in conflict with Policies HC1 and CP14 of the Stroud District Local Plan 2015 (Local Plan) which collectively require development to be compatible with the character, appearance and amenity of the part of the settlement in which it would be located. Moreover there would be conflict with national planning policy in respect of design.

11. The appellant's statement references a Residential Design Guide 2018, however, only the Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Guidance 2000 was submitted with this case. I have had regard to this guidance and find that the proposal would be inconsistent with advice within it which states development should respond to local context and the character of new housing should be consistent with its setting.

12. My attention has also been drawn to the Sustainable Construction and Design SPD 2017, a copy of which has not been submitted as part of this appeal and therefore I have been unable to assess the proposal against this.

Living Conditions

13. The Council does not have any adopted policies setting out minimal internal floorspace standards. Accordingly, and in accordance with the guidance

contained within the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) I have not had regard to the nationally described space standards contained within the Government's Technical housing standards – nationally described standard.

14. The new dwelling would contain a living/dining area, a small kitchen, a double bedroom with built in wardrobes and a shower room, along with an entrance hall with built in storage. Whilst the living room would be of a size to just about ensure the comfort of future occupants, the bedroom would be small and awkwardly shaped. The proposed confining proportions would be further restricted by the space for the two door openings. This would create a cell like room which would be difficult to move within and would not be a pleasant space to use. By virtue of the proposed size and configuration, I find that the new dwelling would not provide sufficient internal space so as to ensure a reasonable quality of living standards for future occupants.

15. No details have been provided as to how a planning condition could rectify this issue. However, given the constraints of this extremely small site, I find that a condition would be unlikely to be able to address the harm identified.

16. Therefore, it is concluded that the proposed development would have insufficient internal floor space to provide an adequate quality of living conditions for future occupants of the dwelling. Consequently, the proposal conflicts with the aims of Policy ES12 of the Local Plan which requires, amongst other matters, that the layout and design of new development creates well designed, socially integrated, high quality successful places, where people enjoy living and working.

Other Matters

17. I note that the appellant has sought to address previous refusal reasons for development on the site. However, for the reasons outlined the revised scheme would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and would provide poor living conditions for future occupants of the dwelling.

18. The planning permission which allows the conversion of an office and storage unit to residential use in Stonehouse relates to a property in a town centre location, and in this respect is distinctly different from the proposal before me. For this reason, I attach limited weight to this matter.

19. The proposal would seek to make an effective use of previously developed land. The principle of the development would not be inconsistent in terms of settlement hierarchy policy of the Local Plan which allows scope for very limited development in tier five settlements. There would be a proportionate contribution in terms of the Community Infrastructure Levy. Furthermore, the dwelling would contribute to housing supply and mix consistent with the Government's objectives to significantly boost the supply of new homes, set out in the Framework. However, these benefits, individually and collectively, would be limited and would not outweigh the considerable harm identified above.

20. I acknowledge that the Government is actively seeking to increase the supply of self-build housing and legislation is in place to secure this objective. The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 and associated Regulations[1] places a duty on authorities to provide plots for such developments and

[1] Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Regulations 2016

maintain and have regard to a register of those seeking to acquire a plot when carrying out planning functions. Accordingly, I have had regard to this matter in reaching this recommendation.

21. Neither the PPG nor the Framework provide a definition of what constitutes self-build housing. However, the PPG advises that in considering whether a home is a self-build or custom build home, relevant authorities must be satisfied that the initial owner of the home will have primary input into its final design and layout. The appellant has not offered a mechanism (for example through a planning obligation) that would provide certainty that the appeal site would be developed as a self-build plot in the terms described above. In the absence of any compelling evidence I am unable to attach any great weight to this matter and conclude for this reason this matter would not outweigh the harm identified in this case.

22. The appeal site's purchase information stated that it may be possible to build a 1 bedroom property, however it was also stated that this would be subject to planning. Regardless of who the vendor was, or the price paid for the land, such statements do not provide certainty that planning will be secured. Therefore, these matters can only have limited weight in reaching this recommendation and in this case.

23. The appeal site is approximately 250m from the Cotswold Beechwoods Site of Special Scientific Interest which is also designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Legislation provides a strict system of protection for such sites with Regulations requiring decision makers to undertake an appropriate assessment where it is likely that development would have significant effects on the SAC. However, in light of the conclusions drawn on other issues it is not necessary to consider this matter further.

Conclusion and Recommendation

24. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all matters raised, I recommend that the appeal should be dismissed.

A J Sutton

APPEAL PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

25. I have considered all the submitted evidence and concur that the appeal should be dismissed

R C Kirby

INSPECTOR