
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 December 2020

by Neil Pope BA (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 December 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C1625/W/20/3257539

Land opposite Nutshell House, Church Lane, Stonehouse, Glos, GL10 2BG.

- 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 Spence against the decision of Stroud District Council.
 - The application Ref. S.20/0618/FUL, dated 17 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 24 July 2020.
 - The development proposed is the construction of a 20m x 40m manège and change of use from agricultural to equestrian.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposed development would preserve the settings of various listed buildings¹ and preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Stroud Industrial Heritage Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

Planning Policy

3. The development plan includes the Stroud District Local Plan (LP) that was adopted in 2015 and the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Development Plan (NP) that was made in 2018. The most important policies to the determination of this appeal are LP policies ES9 (equestrian development), ES10 (historic assets) and NP policy ENV6 (protecting vistas and views).
4. Whilst not forming part of the development plan, my attention has also been drawn to the Stonehouse Design Statement (DS) 2005. This document has been subject to a process of public consultation and is used by the Local Planning Authority as supplementary planning advice. It is aimed at ensuring new development is in keeping with its immediate surroundings. Amongst other things, it identifies special views. The DS can be given moderate weight.

Impact on Designated Heritage Assets

5. The significance of the limestone and slate roof parish Church of St. Cyr is derived from its special architectural and historic qualities. These include its 14th century crenelated tower, the rebuilding works that were undertaken in 1854 by Henry Crisp, internal memorials and its historic role/function as a place for religious worship within this part of Gloucestershire.

¹ The grade II* Church of St. Cyr, the grade II* Stonehouse Court Hotel and the grade II Nutshell Bridge, Nutshell Cottage and Nutshell House.

6. This church has an extensive setting, which has changed over time as Stonehouse has grown in size. This setting includes a foreground of the churchyard and a section of the Stroudwater Navigation Canal (SNC), a mid-ground which contains open fields to the south of the canal, and long-distance views across the landscape and towards the Cotswold escarpment.
7. This 0.19 ha appeal site forms part of a large field to the south of the SNC. This field assists in maintaining the historic countryside setting to the church and helps afford an appreciation and understanding of the significance of this listed building, including its role/function within the local landscape. As I noted during my visit, the appeal site can be seen in views from part of the churchyard. It also appears in a pleasing view of the church from the public right of way to the south east. The unspoilt open qualities of the site make a very small, but positive, contribution to the heritage interest of the church.
8. The significance of the early 17th century Stonehouse Court Hotel, altered in 1906 by E L Lutyens, is derived from its special architectural and historic qualities. These include its 'U' plan form, random rubble limestone walls, stone slate roof, ashlar chimneys, Jacobean fireplace and panelling and its previous function as a large country house.
9. Stonehouse Court Hotel also has an extensive setting. This includes a foreground of lawns, a mid-ground of open fields and long distance views of the Cotswold escarpment. These fields maintain the countryside setting of this listed building and assist in affording an appreciation of its significance, including its historic associations with the surrounding rural landscape. However, the appeal site is screened from this designated heritage asset by mature trees and the church. It does not contribute to its heritage interest.
10. Nutshell Bridge, Nutshell Cottage and Nutshell House were all built circa 1778. Whilst separately listed, their significance is predominantly their group value arising from their functional associations with the development of the SNC. Nutshell House also has special architectural interest, being a handsome building with a canted east end and classical styling. The settings of these listed buildings include the SNC and its towpath, as well as the open fields to the south. These fields form part of the historic landscape setting of these designated heritage assets and assist in affording an appreciation of their heritage interest. The appeal site can be seen from parts of these assets. It makes a very small contribution to their significance.
11. The CA is a very extensive area that includes large sections of the SNC and very many buildings of different types and styles, as well as some fields. I have not been provided with any details of a conservation area appraisal. It appears to me that the special architectural and historic interest of the CA include the contribution made by the various listed buildings², the SNC and the unspoilt open attributes of the fields. These fields help retain a pleasing sense of contrast between the historic industrial features and their rural landscape setting. There are attractive views³ of the countryside from the section of the SNC to the south of the Church of St. Cyr. These views include the appeal site.
12. The proposed manège would be constructed alongside an existing barn/stable. It would provide an entry level outdoor arena for the appellant and would be

² These include all of the above noted grade II* and grade II listed buildings.

³ I note that these form some of the special views identified within the DS. As I saw during my visit, the canal towpath is popular with walkers and cyclists.

surrounded by a 1.2m high timber stock fence. There would be no external lighting and the finished surface would comprise a thick layer of sand on an aggregate base. Equestrian uses and facilities are commonly found throughout the countryside. Where appropriately sited, manèges do not cause harm.

13. The proposed development would be set away from the above noted listed buildings and would be sited towards the corner of the field. When seen from the above noted grade II listed buildings, the development would comprise a very minor element within the settings of these designated heritage assets and would not have any significant impact on their heritage interest⁴.
14. However, from the section of the SNC to the south of the Church of St. Cyr the engineered form of the manège, its surface finish and fencing would contrast awkwardly with the mainly unspoilt qualities of the remainder of the field. The proposal would comprise a noticeable change to the historic landscape setting of the church and to this part of the CA. Whilst it would not impede views of the Cotswold escarpment, the development would be a distracting element within these views and, to a limited extent, would erode the historic landscape settings of the church and the CA. The proposal would detract from an appreciation of the historic interest of these designated heritage assets.
15. The proposed development would also be seen in the foreground of a view of the Church of St. Cyr from the public footpath to the south east of the appeal site. From here, the size, form and appearance of the proposal would be very apparent and would detract from an appreciation of the historic landscape setting of this building which is of more than special interest. This would be a further harmful impact upon the significance of this listed building.
16. In the context of the National Planning Policy Framework, the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Church of St. Cyr and the CA. If there is a sliding scale of harm within this category the proposal would be towards the lower end. However, this does not amount to a less than substantial planning objection. Great weight must be given to an asset's conservation and the more important the asset, the greater the weight.
17. The appeal site forms part of a key wildlife site as identified within the NP. The appellant's Preliminary Ecological Appraisal found that there would be no impact on rare or valuable habitats and that managing the Himalayan Balsam along the bank of the River Frome would be beneficial for biodiversity. Although this would be a public benefit of the proposal, neither this, nor any other public benefit, would be sufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified above.

Overall Conclusion

18. The proposed development would preserve the settings of some listed buildings⁵ but would fail to preserve the setting of the Church of St. Cyr and would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. It would conflict with the provisions of LP policies ES9, ES10, NP policy ENV6 and the aim of the DS. I therefore conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

Neil Pope

Inspector

⁴ There would also be no perceptible change to the setting or significance of Stonehouse Court Hotel.

⁵ Stonehouse Court Hotel, Nutshell Bridge, Nutshell Cottage and Nutshell House.