The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 19 April 2021

by Mr S Rennie BSc (Hons), BA (Hons), MA, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/W/21/3267131
52 High Street, Stanford In The Vale, FARINGDON, SN7 8NQ

- 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 Paul Rees against the decision of Vale of White Horse District Council.
- The application Ref P20/V1098/FUL, dated 28 April 2020, was refused by notice dated 9 October 2020.
- The development proposed is the change of use of old barn from a garage to a single one-bedroom house.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the development on (1) the character and appearance of the area (part of the Stanford In The Vale Conservation Area (CA)), and (2) the living conditions of future occupiers.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. The 'old barn' has the appearance of a large outbuilding, which is associated with No 52 High Street, even though it is positioned across the road in St Denys Close. I note that there are other more modern garage outbuildings set behind the appeal building along St Denys Close. However, the position of the appeal building and its orientation results in it appearing to form part of the High Street in terms of its street scene context.

4. The High Street has a varied mix of residential properties, with the appellant providing some examples of these, but the prevailing character is for two storey houses often set within spacious plots with large rear gardens. There are some exceptions, but this is the predominant character. No 52 High Street is one such exception, being a bungalow but still has a spacious plot.

5. However, even with the variety in plot sizes and dwelling types in the High Street, the proposed change of use would result in a particularly small single storey dwelling, set within a very tight and narrow plot which would not be spacious. Indeed, it would appear as a dwelling cramped within a small plot within the context of this street scene, as indicated by the lack of external space within the boundaries of the site, for example. For a combination of these reasons, the proposed dwelling would appear incongruous with the prevailing character of the High Street and would detract from the qualities of its street scene, being that it is set in a prominent location on this corner plot.

6. I acknowledge that the building would not be extended or changed significantly with alterations, but currently it appears as an outbuilding of some sort. As an outbuilding it is of a typical size and form, to the front of other garages along this side of St Denys Close. However, the conversion would result in an independent dwelling with a more intensive use which would appear out of keeping with the other dwelling sizes and plots within this area.

7. The alterations to the building are not harmful and the proposed landscaping would be a visual improvement over the current frontage. Nonetheless, the change of the building to a dwelling is not appropriate in these circumstances, given the prevailing character of the area.

8. Furthermore, this area is a designated Conservation Area (CA). Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas in the exercise of planning functions. I note that the Council did not raise any objection in terms of harm to the CA, primarily due to the fact there was not going to be any significant physical alterations to the building, which would be retained. However, being within a CA it does convey that this site is particularly sensitive to development due to its heritage significance, derived from being a historic part of the village with many fine examples of older traditional buildings. The introduction of an independent dwelling using what is a modest size building and particularly cramped plot would counter these qualities in this sensitive location.

9. For these reasons the proposed use of the existing building as a dwelling would be harmful to the character and appearance of this location, contrary to policy CP37 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031. This policy requires development to respond positively to the site surroundings and reinforce local identity, amongst other things.

Living Conditions

10. The proposed dwelling would be small, though the appellant states that this would be big enough for a single occupant. Based on the nationally described space standards, the dwelling size would be large enough for a single storey 1 bed- 1 person dwelling.

11. The Council have pointed out that a double bed is shown on the submitted layout plan. Whilst this is noted, the bedroom itself appears to be of a size which, based on the nationally described space standards, may be more suitable for single occupancy.

12. For this reason, I conclude that the dwelling would have sufficient internal space.

13. The proposed layout would see all the garden space to the front of the dwelling, adjacent to the High Street. This is not ideal, particularly from a privacy perspective. However, for the size of dwelling the garden would have sufficient space. The appellant has also explained there would be a high hedge to protect privacy. Whilst a condition requiring such a hedge is unlikely to be enforceable in the long term, if future occupants were concerned with privacy within their garden area it is likely they would maintain the hedgerow in the future.

14. For these reasons, the proposal would provide adequate living conditions to future occupants, in accordance with policy CP37 and DP2 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031, which sets a requirement for space standards, for example.

Planning Balance

15. The proposal has benefits, such as the proposed enhanced landscaping, active re-use of an existing old building of character and history and also providing a new dwelling in an accessible location towards local housing supply and the mix available. As this is a single dwelling proposed, the cumulative benefits would be modest.

16. Whilst these benefits and all others raised by the appellant are noted, these benefits are clearly and demonstrably outweighed by the harm to the character and appearance of the area, for the reasons set out above.

Other Matters

17. The Council has raised the issue of Community Infrastructure Levy liability. There is some disagreement between the parties on this issue, but as I have found significant character and appearance harm and therefore dismissing the appeal, I have not pursued this matter further.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Mr S Rennie

INSPECTOR