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## Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 8 June 2021

**by R Walmsley BSc, MSc, MA, MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 24 June 2021**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/D3450/W/21/3269038**

**The Cowshed, Manor Farm Barns, Well Lane, High Offley, Stafford  
ST20 0ND**

- 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 Mrs Georgina Key against the decision of Staffordshire County Council.
- The application Ref 20/32605/FUL dated 29 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 28 October 2020.
- The development proposed is change of use from storage building into single person retirement accommodation and reduce the existing vehicular access from 18m wide to 3m.

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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Main Issue

2. These are whether the proposal would be in a suitable location, having regard to relevant local planning policies and the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

### Reasons

3. The appeal site is outside of the Sustainable Settlement Hierarchy identified in Policy SP3 of the Local Plan (2014) and is therefore within the open countryside. Policies SP6 and SP7 of the Local Plan support rural sustainability and of particular relevance to the appeal proposal, support the re-use of redundant buildings and development that is consistent with Policy E2. Policy E2 lists criteria (a)–(i) as the means to decide the acceptability of the use and re-use of rural buildings. The Council refused the proposal on the grounds of Policy E2(a) and (f).
4. There is little evidence before me to demonstrate that a suitable commercial re-use of the building cannot be achieved. The appeal building, like the stables to which it adjoins, have become separated from the original farm and as a result occupy a modestly sized plot of land. I have no doubt that this has made it increasingly difficult to sustain a farm in the way it originally operated. However, I have no evidence of other agricultural and rural practices being unworkable or unviable. Furthermore, whilst I appreciate the difficulties associated with bringing an antique/café type property or workshops forward, I have no financial evidence before me that corroborates the appellant's view that the upfront costs could not be retrieved in rent/increased property value.

Policy E2(a) states that 'every attempt' should be made to secure a commercial re-use and in light of my findings, this has not been the case. I cannot conclude, therefore, that priority has been given to an economic use before residential.

5. Policy E2(f) relates to the location of development. The development would be outside of an existing settlement and unsupported by public transport. Access to local services and facilities would, therefore, be limited to a car or taxi which would not be a sustainable mode of travel. Whilst the appellant expresses a willingness to travel by taxi, this might not be the case for future occupiers, if planning permission was given.
6. Included within the Council's reasons for refusal is reference to the design of the building and the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, with reference to Policy E2(d) and (e).
7. Whilst I can surmise that the alterations would not be proposed if the building could not sustain them, I have no evidence of the building being structurally sound to say confidently that the development would comply with E2(d) in this regard.
8. Policy E2(e) requires that the design of the building is assessed through an appraisal of character and significance of the building and has regard to the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project or successor documents. I have no evidence before me of the development being appraised in this way.
9. Although the appeal site is within proximity of other residential buildings, it is physically and visually separate from them. The site's immediate context is rural in character, owing to the sense of openness borne out of open fields and the rural character of the site itself. Whilst the overall form and mass of the building would remain unchanged and the external alterations minimal, domesticating the building and creating an enclosed parking area and garden would be a visual intrusion into the countryside, particularly given the comings and goings that would be associated with the site in residential use. On this basis, and in the absence of any visual appraisal to suggest otherwise, I find that the proposal would be harmful to its rural setting and contrary to Policy E2 and N1 which, amongst other things, seek to ensure that new development respects local character and enhances surroundings.
10. All in all, when having regard to relevant local planning policies and the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, the proposal would not be in a suitable location and therefore would be contrary to Policies SP6, SP7 and E2 of the Local Plan.

## **Conclusion**

11. For the reasons given and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the development would be contrary to the development plan when taken as a whole. There are no material considerations to suggest a decision other than in accordance with the development plan and therefore the appeal is dismissed.

*R Walmsley*

INSPECTOR