



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 29 June 2021

by F Rafiq BSc (Hons) MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th November 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3425/W/21/3270915

Norbury Manor Barns, Manor Drive, Norbury, Stafford ST20 0RL

- 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 Steve Spencer (Norbury Park) against the decision of Stafford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20/32341/FUL, dated 12 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 3 December 2020.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of Dutch Barn to provide garaging and domestic storage/home office.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. A revised National Planning Policy Framework was published in July 2021 (the Framework). Whilst the paragraph numbers have changed in regard to those relevant to the main issues of this case, the substance thereof remains the same as the 2019 iteration. I have sought comments from the main parties and taken any made into consideration.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - (a) whether the existing building's physical form is capable of conversion to facilitate the proposed use; and
 - (b) if so, the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Conversion

4. The appeal site comprises of a 'Dutch' barn which has a rectangular plan form. It is an open structure, with the roof supported on a metal frame. The proposal puts forward a scheme that seeks to convert the existing structure to create garages on the ground floor and storage/home office space above each respective garage.
5. Policy E2 of The Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 (The Plan) sets out to support the achievement of rural sustainability. Within rural areas, it states that developments that provide for the sustainable use and re-use of rural

buildings for appropriate uses will be permitted. The policy goes on to set out a number of criteria by which such proposals will be assessed. One of these states that the building should be structurally sound and is capable of conversion without the need for extension or significant alteration or rebuilding.

6. The submitted Structural Report (April 2020), states that the structure of the appeal building is commensurate with its age and it remains suitable for its intended use. I have no reason to doubt this and note that the existing metal frame is to remain without the need to rebuild this external structure. However, in order to comply with the relevant criteria of Policy E2 of The Plan, the building needs to be capable of conversion without the need for significant alteration.
7. As the building is an open structure without any walls, the proposal would require fully enclosing. This would include external blockwork with significant cladding as well as large barn doors. Further works comprise of new internal walls and a new timber first floor structure. Beyond this, I have been provided with limited information on the full extent of building operations required to undertake the scheme proposed, but it is clear that extensive foundations will be required to support the new walls. Although the proposal would be contained within the existing footprint of the barn and there would be no extension beyond this, given the extensive alterations proposed, its conversion would necessitate significant alteration.
8. To conclude, the proposal has failed to demonstrate that the existing building's physical form is capable of being converted to facilitate the proposed use. As such, it would conflict with Policy E2 of The Plan, which seeks, amongst other matters, the re-use of rural buildings that are capable of conversion without the need for significant alteration.

Character and Appearance

9. The barn is accessed from Norbury Junction along a long private road. It is located close to a group of former agricultural buildings that have previously been converted to residential use. There are a small number of other buildings in the vicinity of the appeal site. However, the pattern of development is scattered and is dominated by large areas of agricultural land, fields and areas of woodland which all contribute to the rural character and appearance of the area.
10. The appeal barn is a tall structure, but this is tempered by its open walls which allow views through it to the surrounding countryside. In contrast, the proposal, which would involve the building's full enclosure would result in a significant change from its currently utilitarian agricultural appearance to that of a solid structure, which would instead have a dominant presence in the landscape.
11. Although the appellant considers that overriding views would be maintained, it is evident that current views through the structure, which is supported by a slender metal frame would be obstructed by the walls and doors. The development would make use of agricultural features, such as black corrugated cladding and local timber. I note the palette of materials and also that the original steel frame would remain exposed. The works would also minimise domestic features such as windows. Nevertheless, these points would be

outweighed by the extent of the proposed development and its impact on the open, rural character of the area.

12. I appreciate that if the building was being use for agricultural purposes, it would contain hay, straw or other equipment and this would interrupt views through the structure. Nonetheless, I do not consider this to be comparable to the impact of the permanent solid form proposed. It has also been stated that the proposal strengthens the street frontage, but the appeal site is located in a rural area and despite the proximity to the nearby dwellings, there is no continuous street frontage. The enclosure in this context would have a harmful impact on the rural, spacious character of the area.
13. To conclude therefore on this issue, the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. As such, it would conflict with Policies N1 and E2 of The Plan, which seek, amongst other matters, high quality design. It would also be contrary to Paragraph 130 of the Framework, which seeks to ensure that development is sympathetic to local character, the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.

Other Matters

14. The proposal seeks to make efficient use of land through utilising an existing structure. It would also support home working and the appellant has set out the health, productivity and the environmental benefits arising from not travelling to a workplace. The provision of garages and storage would also ensure additional car parking that is discreet as well as the visual benefits of removing domestic paraphernalia and supporting the retention of tenants on this estate. The appellant has also set out the consideration of alternatives and that an open structure would not provide secure storage or protection from the weather. I attach some weight to these matters but, even when taken together, they would be insufficient against the substantial weight I attach to the harm I have found in relation to the main issues and the conflict with the development plan.
15. My attention has been drawn to Policy C5 of The Plan. Although the appellant has stated that the proposal could be considered as an extension to the existing dwellings, the appeal building is physically separate from these nearby buildings. In any case, this and other policies referenced require the consideration of the effect on the character of the surrounding area. I have found in this regard that the development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
16. The proposal would be acceptable in relation to flood risk, is not subject to any heritage designations and I note that no objections were received from consultees. The development would also not compromise high quality agricultural land nor the living conditions of residential properties. The Public Right of Way would not be adversely impacted, and the garage and storage/home office use would be cohesive with the surrounding uses. These are however neutral considerations and not matters which weigh in favour of the development.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons given above, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework, and all other relevant material considerations, the appeal is dismissed.

F Rafiq

INSPECTOR