



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 January 2022

by Neil Pope BA(HONS) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 January 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/J9497/W/21/3267709

Park House, Grenofen, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 9EW

- 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 & Mrs N & J Eadie against the decision of Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA).
 - The application Ref. 0120/20, dated 17/1/20, was refused by notice dated 27/10/20.
 - The development proposed is remodelling of existing dwelling and erection of dwelling to be considered under paragraph 79(e) of the NPPF 2019.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. There have been changes to the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) since DNPA determined the application.
3. The Dartmoor Local Plan 2018-2036 (LP) has now been adopted. This supersedes the policies in the DNPA Core Strategy (2008) and the Development Plan Management and Delivery Plan Document (2013).
4. Paragraph 80 of the latest version of the Framework relates to isolated homes in the countryside. Paragraph 80(e) relates to design quality.
5. DNPA and the appellants agree that the appeal site lies outside the confines of any settlement that is identified for growth within the development plan. For planning policy purposes, it is also agreed that the site should be treated as lying within the countryside.
6. There is disagreement between the main parties as to whether or not all of the appeal site comprises previously developed land. On the basis of the evidence before me, including aerial photographs, it appears that the part of the site on which it is proposed to construct the new dwelling was agricultural land in April 2015. Whilst this now forms part of the domestic curtilage to the existing dwelling, there is greater strength in DNPA's argument that this change of use is unauthorised¹. However, my decision does not turn on this matter.

Main Issue

7. The main issue is whether the proposal would be justified as an exception to national and local planning policies restricting isolated homes in the countryside, having particular regard to the quality of the proposed design.

¹ The plans supplied by the appellants in respect of previous approvals show the bulk of the appeal site edged in blue. This usually denotes other land within applicants ownership/control, rather than any ancillary/incidental use.

Reasons

Planning Policy

8. The most important development plan policies to the determination of this appeal are LP policies 1.1 (national park purposes and protecting special qualities), 1.2 (sustainable development), 1.3 (spatial strategy), 1.5 (good design) and 2.1 (landscape protection). There does not appear to be any equivalent LP provision to paragraph 80(e) of the Framework.
9. The appeal site lies within an area where national and local planning policies restrict new housing to specified categories. The proposal does not meet any of the exceptions provided for within the development plan and would conflict with LP policy 1.3. Nevertheless, paragraph 80(e) of the Framework is an important material consideration that carries considerable weight.
10. In determining this appeal, I have also had particular regard to section 12 of the Framework. This emphasises the importance of achieving well-designed places, including the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings. In National Parks, the Framework also provides that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty.
11. Whilst not planning policy, my attention has been drawn to the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 'Dartmoor National Park Design Guide'. This was adopted by DNPA in 2011 and, amongst other things, includes advice in respect of contemporary design.

The Site and Surroundings

12. This 0.7 ha appeal site includes the appellants existing detached house and its sizeable garden. This house is at the eastern edge of the hamlet of Grenofen and at the end of a row of mid-20th century detached dwellings which, in the main, have painted rendered walls and pitched slate roofs. These dwellings are generally sited in the northern third of their plots and set back short distances from the road. This creates a pleasing rhythm to the pattern of development.
13. A large part of the appeal site is open and comprises grass/lawn. Much of the site slopes gently downwards in a south easterly direction. There are uninterrupted views across the Walkham Valley to the south and towards the open access land and moorland above and to the west of Horrabridge.
14. The appeal site lies within the Moorland Edge Slopes landscape character type² (LCT). The valued attributes of this LCT include a rich and intricate landscape full of contrasts, a pastoral character of fields contrasting with areas of heathy moorland and spectacular views to the moorland core as well as the surrounding countryside. The landscape condition of this LCT includes a strongly rural landscape set within a framework of medieval fields with strong visual links to the nearby open moorland.
15. As I saw during my visit, parts of the appeal site can be seen from the road to the north and east. There are also glimpses from a small section of the A386. From these parts of the public realm the site is seen by 'moderate sensitivity' receptors passing through this part of the national park.

² As defined within 'A Landscape Character Assessment for Dartmoor National Park' 2017. This document can be given moderate weight.

16. More important views of the site are available from the open access land to the south. From here, the site is visible from lengthy sections of the various paths that cross this part of the national park. I noted that these paths are popular with visitors and dog-walkers. These are 'high sensitivity' receptors spending their leisure time enjoying the high landscape/amenity value of this part of the national park. This includes views northwards towards and beyond the site.
17. The largely unspoilt, green open qualities of the eastern/south eastern part of the appeal site provide a 'soft' and pleasing undeveloped edge to Grenofen. When seen from the public access land to the south, much of this part of the site appears akin to the farmland surrounding Grenofen and an integral part of the field system/rural landscape. This makes a small, but positive contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the national park.

Design Quality

18. The proposed development would result in two contemporary designed dwellings occupying the plot. These two storey, flat roof buildings would be lower in height than the existing dwelling. The new house would be sited to the south east of the remodelled dwelling and would set be at a lower height.
19. The dwellings would be finished with fibre cement tiles on the external walls together with some horizontal hardwood timber panelling. The roofs would comprise standing seam metal with solar panel arrays. Both dwellings would be designed for low energy usage and there would be improved insulation performance in the remodelled house.
20. The new dwelling would be sited approximately in the centre of the plot and would be linked to the remodelled house by a tall 'inhabited wall'. This would be of concrete construction with a rough board textured finish. In essence, this wall would comprise the service wing and would include a utility room, plant room and garage space. This 'linear' approach to the design concept would divide the plot into two roughly equal parts with the aim of reflecting the existing pattern of development.
21. Bee bricks, bat roosting panels and sparrow terraces would be incorporated within the overall design of the buildings. These have potential for some limited biodiversity enhancement. Important trees within the site would be retained and about 80 metres of new hedgerow would be provided along the south eastern boundary. This new section of hedgerow would also be likely to benefit nature conservation interests and would reinforce the field pattern.
22. It is evident from the various reports and statements submitted with the appeal that a detailed assessment of the character of the site and surrounding landscape has been undertaken on behalf of the appellants. This has informed the proposed development and the appellants' architect has given thoughtful consideration to the design of the proposed dwelling and the remodelled house.
23. The proposal was considered by the independent Design Review Panel (DRP) on at least two separate occasions and has received broad support from this panels of experts. Having considered the views of the DRP³, the information

³ The 'Notes' at the end of the DRP's comments state that the contents are "*opinion and suggestion only*" and that whilst the "*Local Authority may be advised by the suggestions of the Design Review Panel there is no obligation to be bound by its suggestions.*" The appellants' agent's argument that more weight should be given to the views of the DRP than DNPA would be an unsound approach. It is also unclear to me if the DRP undertook a site visit.

submitted in support of the appeal and after visiting the site and surroundings, I consider that the proposal would be designed to a very good standard. However, I struggle to see how it would be so remarkable or excellent as to reach the very high bar of being a truly outstanding design. Moreover, in the context of the Framework, it could not reasonably be described as "*beautiful*".

24. Similar designed buildings, albeit possibly without the linked 'inhabited wall' element, and materials have been used in contemporary schemes elsewhere and the proposal would not be unusual in terms of its architectural aesthetics. If anything, the proposed fibre cements slates would strike a discordant note with the local vernacular, which includes the widespread use of natural slates⁴. Whilst enhanced insulation performance and the proposed solar arrays are to be welcomed, it is now commonplace for buildings to include such technologies.
25. I note that the scheme of development has the potential to assist post graduate studies at the Plymouth School of Architecture. Whilst this is also to be welcomed, any well designed scheme is likely to assist in raising the standards of design. My experience of Dartmoor National Park is that a generally high standard of design is already achieved in new developments.
26. Paragraph 80(e) of the Framework also requires development to significantly enhance its immediate setting and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area. In this regard, I have considered the contents of the appellants Landscape and Visual Appraisal. As noted above, some elements of the proposal, such as the new section of hedgerow, would result in some limited enhancement to the immediate setting. However, the proposal would entail the construction of a sizeable new house with access driveway and inevitable domestic paraphernalia on a site which I have found to make a small, but positive contribution to the character and appearance of this part of Dartmoor.
27. The new dwelling would be overtly residential in character and would markedly change the character and appearance of the eastern/south eastern part of the plot. It would considerably erode the largely unspoilt, green open qualities of this part of the site and would extend the pattern of housing into the countryside to the east of Grenofen. This new house would also be set back much further into the plot than neighbouring dwellings. Notwithstanding the linked/boundary wall it would disrupt the local rhythm/pattern of development.
28. From the open access land to the south, the new dwelling would form a small part of the wide expanse of view. However, views are important in appreciating the landscape attributes of the national park. Part of the new building (including lighting) and its access road would be clearly visible in these views. This would appear as an unwelcome urban intrusion into the attractive countryside/rural landscape that surrounds Grenofen and would detract from the scenic qualities of the area. This weighs heavily against an approval.
29. The adverse impact upon the character and appearance of this part of the national park that I have identified would not be ameliorated by the new hedgerow and planting. The proposal would fail to significantly enhance its immediate setting. It would be at odds with some valued attributes of the Moorland Edge Slopes landscape character type, as well as the purpose of

including viewing the appeal site from the open access land to the south. Whilst photographic information can assist the decision-making process, the experience can be very different when on site.

⁴ It is unclear to me how the proposed materials are perceived by the DRP to link back to granite extraction on Dartmoor.

conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area. The development would conflict with the provisions of LP policies 1.1, 1.2 (a) and (j), 1.5 and 2.1 and would be at odds with the aims of the SPD.

30. I conclude that the proposal would not be justified as an exception to national and local planning policies restricting isolated homes in the countryside. The appeal should not therefore succeed.

31. *Neil Pope*

Inspector