



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 February 2022

by David Wyborn BSc(Hons) MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/21/3282097

Holly Grove Farm, Long Crichel, Wimborne BH21 5LB

- 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 Coppid Farming Enterprises LLP against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref 3/20/1159/FUL, dated 3 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 10 June 2021.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of three steel framed agricultural barns, their replacement with two dwellings and the conversion of traditional courtyard buildings into two residential dwellings, along with associated parking, landscaping and infrastructure.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the parking arrangements for Holly Grove Farmhouse, and
 - whether the scheme would be supported by the development plan in this location and, if not, whether material considerations indicate that a decision should be made otherwise, including having regard to the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), the location within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the AONB), the ability to access services and facilities by sustainable means, and the reuse of buildings considered to be a non-designated heritage asset.

Reasons

Parking Arrangements

3. Holly Grove Farmhouse is located to the side of the vehicular access to the yard and courtyard buildings the subject of this appeal. It appears that the occupants of the house use the courtyard area for parking of domestic vehicles and this ability to park would be lost if the appeal site was to be developed. However, there is a vehicular access to the other side of the Farmhouse curtilage which leads to the farm buildings at the rear. The appellant has explained that a parking area could be formed off this access which could serve the Farmhouse and this would be convenient and practical for its purpose.

4. I agree with the Council that it would be best if the provision of the replacement parking area could be controlled by a planning condition attached to any approval. However, the Farmhouse and surrounding land is not shown within the appeal site red or blue lined land and therefore it appears, on this information, to be beyond the control and ownership of the appellant. Nevertheless, the occupants of the Farmhouse would, it seems to me, require parking readily available and it could easily be provided off the other access. I consider that there would be no substantive reason why this parking would not be provided if the appeal site was to be developed. It would be within the control and interests of the owner of the Farmhouse to do so and therefore, in all likelihood, the necessary parking would be provided and no parking or highway safety issue would result.
5. In these circumstances, I conclude that satisfactory parking arrangements would, in all likelihood, be provided for the occupants of Holly Grove Farmhouse if the appeal site was developed. Accordingly, the scheme would comply with Policy KS12 of the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan – Part 1 – Core Strategy (April 2014) (the Core Strategy) which seeks, amongst other things, that adequate vehicle parking will be provided to serve the needs of the proposed development.

Whether the scheme would be supported by the development plan in this location, and, if not, whether material considerations indicate that a decision should be made otherwise.

6. Policy KS2 of the Core Strategy establishes the settlement hierarchy and the related strategy for the location, scale and distribution of development across the plan area. Settlement types are identified and these include main settlements through to named villages. Outside these named settlements, the policy explains that development at hamlets would not be allowed unless it was functionally required to be in the rural area.
7. The wider site at Holly Grove Farm consists of a small farmstead with a main farmhouse, the courtyard buildings and modern agricultural barns. There is a pair of semi-detached houses further along the road and another dwelling close to the bend. This group of buildings appears on the ground to be somewhat separated from the informal and fairly sporadic arrangement of buildings at Long Crichel, which the Council consider to be a hamlet. However, given the nature and spread of Long Crichel, on balance, the site can be considered to fall within the hamlet. However, Long Crichel is not a named settlement and therefore the site falls to be considered as countryside for the purposes of the Core Strategy.
8. The proposed four, open market houses would not meet with the policy approach that only housing with a functional requirement should be permitted in such a countryside location and, therefore, I conclude that the scheme would conflict with Policy KS2 of the Core Strategy.
9. In terms of whether the site would be in a sustainable location, I appreciate that the Framework accepts that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and that this should be taken into account. However, this site location would be fairly remote from larger settlements and there is little evidence that future occupants would be able to access services and facilities on a regular basis by sustainable means such as walking, cycling or public transport. Occupants would be largely

dependent on the private vehicle and this weighs against the provision of the housing in this fairly isolated location. While the use of electric vehicles is increasing, such vehicles could not be required as the means of travel for occupants and visitors to the site and therefore this option is not a matter that leads me to a different conclusion on the accessibility drawbacks of this location. My concerns with the likely dependence on the private vehicle for future occupants of the housing reinforces the rationale of the Core Strategy approach of only allowing housing which has a functional requirement in this area.

10. Notwithstanding this general approach, paragraph 80 of the Framework identifies exceptions to the requirement to avoid development of isolated homes in the countryside. In principle, only one of the exceptions would need to be met for a proposal to accord with paragraph 80. The case is advanced that the scheme would meet one or more of these exceptions and I examine these issues below.
11. The Council and appellant agree that the courtyard buildings can be considered a non-designated heritage asset. I have had regard to the Heritage Statement (February 2021) and, in my view, a main interest with the courtyard buildings lies with the barn along the western side. This has a brick lower section with timber framing above and is an interesting building that includes the larger cart doors and provides a feature within the courtyard.
12. Also the courtyard wall along the south is an attractive and older feature but the building that is attached to it appears to be a more modern structure with some breeze block elevations and makes little historic contribution in itself. The building along the northern side of the courtyard has some historic interest, particularly with its brick sections and previous use, but appears to have been altered to a reasonable extent and therefore this has diminished its importance.
13. Overall the courtyard buildings as a group are valuable but collectively they are at the lower end of importance in terms of their value as a non-designated heritage asset. Their significance largely comes from their grouping and layout in association with the original farmhouse and their age, historic interest as part of the farmstead, together with their historic contribution to the agricultural heritage of the area.
14. The scheme to convert the buildings has, in general, been sensitively designed, including utilising existing openings and incorporating traditional replacement materials. With Unit A, which is located closest to the road, I have some concerns with the location of the parking, the creation of an entrance door within the southern wall and that new build works are incorporated as part of the proposal in the south west corner of the courtyard. This could all add domestication to the front section of the site and the proposed living room and kitchen addition would obscure part of the end, brick gable of the main barn along the western side of the courtyard. However, there appears that there was a building in the southwest corner of the site in the past and an extensive landscaping scheme along the frontage could help to mitigate the paraphernalia which may come from the domestic use of the building.
15. In terms of the other elements of the scheme, the demolition of the agricultural barn running along the side of the northern courtyard building would enable it to be revealed and, together with the proposed soft landscaping provided, this

would be a benefit. The removal of the two modern barns to the west would open up views of this side elevation of the courtyard barn and allow a greater appreciation of this part of the non-designated heritage asset. This again is a benefit and the setting of the heritage asset would be improved.

16. Overall, because of the conversion of the courtyard buildings to two dwellings and the removal of the three barns, the proposal would re-use redundant and dis-used buildings and enhance their immediate setting. In these terms these components of the scheme would meet with the requirements of paragraph 80c of the Framework that can allow new dwellings in the countryside.
17. Additionally, the conversion of the courtyard buildings to two dwellings could also merit consideration as the optimal viable use of this heritage asset. Their significance as a non-designated heritage asset would not be adversely affected. In respect of the conversion element of the scheme in isolation, I consider that this could meet the requirements of the first section of paragraph 80b of the Framework.
18. However, the scheme would also incorporate two new build dwellings. These are argued to be necessary as enabling development to assist the viability of the scheme and thereby secure the future of the heritage asset. Nevertheless, I have not been presented with any detailed and authoritative costings that clearly demonstrate that the two new build dwellings would be necessary and the minimum level of development to ensure that the overall scheme would be viable. The findings in the Preliminary Structural Survey do not lead me to a different conclusion.
19. Also, even if this was the case, I am not satisfied that, given the reasonably low level of importance of the non-designated heritage asset, the provision of two new build dwellings in the open countryside would be a proportionate and appropriate level of enabling development to justify the conservation of the courtyard buildings. Consequently, the scheme would not accord with the second limb of paragraph 80b of the Framework.
20. For completeness, the two new build dwellings are well designed and would sit comfortably within the road when seen in conjunction with the other pair of dwellings and the farmhouse. The design of these new dwellings, however, largely follows the appearance of the other pair and would not be of such quality that they would raise design standards or be truly outstanding so as to meet with the requirements of paragraph 80e of the Framework.
21. Examining other matters, the site lies within the AONB and I am conscious of the Framework requirement that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.
22. The two larger agricultural buildings that are proposed to be removed are clearly apparent and quite bulky, although they are fairly typical of agricultural buildings which are seen throughout countryside areas. These two buildings are grouped with other buildings and are not particularly prominent in wider landscape views. Nevertheless their removal would open up the side of the courtyard buildings and the replacement dwellings in this location, with their complementary design, would not look out of place. The removal of the farm building to the rear of the northern courtyard building would be beneficial to the building it is presently attached to but as this more modern farm building is

fairly obscured from view, being positioned between other buildings, there would be minimal benefit to the landscape from its removal.

23. I have carefully considered all the landscape submissions, including the Landscape and Visual Appraisal. I conclude that the overall impact of the development, notably from the removal of the three barns, the conversion of the courtyard barns and the building of the two new dwellings, would lead to a localised and modest positive visual improvement to the character and appearance of the area. In this respect the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB would be enhanced. Concerns regarding light pollution and some of the other impacts of residential use of the site could be addressed by planning conditions in any approval.
24. However, I consider that the extent of landscape improvements that would result from the scheme, in particular the removal of the more functional agricultural buildings as proposed and associated landscaping of the areas, would not justify in themselves the construction of the two new build dwellings contrary to adopted planning policy.
25. The appellant has outlined a series of other planning benefits to be considered in the overall planning balance. The scheme would deliver four additional dwellings to the supply of housing and on a windfall site. There would be social and economic benefits to the local economy during construction and in subsequent occupation, although these would be to a limited degree due to the scale of the proposal, and in respect of construction would only be for a limited time. However, as the site is not in an especially accessible location, and as the Council is now able to demonstrate a Framework compliant supply of housing land, the benefits from the boost to the economy and to the supply of housing in this location merit limited weight.
26. I have taken into account all the green infrastructure and ecological benefits, such as the provision of turfed gardens instead of hardstanding areas, hedgerow planting and bird boxes. They are all worthwhile benefits of the scheme. However, these benefits would be limited in scale because of the size of the site and the extent of their provision and therefore they would afford limited weight in favour of approval. The incorporation of a sustainable drainage scheme would also be worthwhile but again this merits limited weight.
27. The scheme would not cause harm to highway safety with the level of traffic generated and, as I have concluded above, satisfactory parking could be provided for the occupants of the farmhouse. However, these are not benefits of the scheme and should be considered as neutral in the overall analysis.

Planning Balance

28. Drawing all these matters together, planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case, the provision of four open market residential units in this location, outside any named settlement, would be contrary to Policy KS2 of the Core Strategy. This harm is reinforced by the location of the site which would mean that most occupants would be reliant on the private vehicle to access services and facilities. These are matters that afford substantial weight against the proposal.

29. In terms of other considerations, the element of the scheme for the conversion of the courtyard buildings to two dwellings, with the removal of the three barns, would re-use redundant and disused buildings and enhance the immediate surroundings. These elements of the scheme would comply with paragraph 80c of the Framework. This would weigh in favour of the scheme and to some extent off sets the harm I have identified from the conflict with the development plan in respect of the two dwellings which would be delivered by the conversion element of the proposal.
30. There would also be benefits to the courtyard buildings with their conversion to two dwellings as their gradual decline would be addressed and this non-designated heritage asset would have a future in a use which could be considered optimal. The design and layout would respect their character, appearance and historic significance. The Framework explains that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining an application. While the proposal for the courtyard buildings is fairly sensitive, as the buildings are at the lower end of the scale of importance as a non-designated heritage asset, the benefits of conversion in this respect are considered to carry modest weight in favour of the proposal.
31. I have concluded that the scheme as a whole would enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB. While this matter should be attributed great weight in accordance with the Framework, the effect would be localised and modest and therefore this constitutes a moderate consideration in support of the scheme.
32. The other benefits that have been argued in support of the scheme, such as the boost to housing supply, economic and social impacts, ecological and green infrastructure, and drainage issues, cumulatively afford limited weight in favour because of the modest scale of the benefits.
33. I have taken into account all the representations including from the Vale of Allen Parish Council who, while raising no objection, comment that the scheme would be an improvement to the area, including by the replacement of a barn and by providing local housing.
34. Weighing all these matters together, the conversion of the courtyard buildings, which can be considered a non-designated heritage asset, has merit and the removal of the more modern barns is important in providing an enhancement to the overall scheme and the area. However, the provision of the two new build dwellings would be clearly contrary to adopted policy and their construction would not be proportionate or justified because of the modest benefits that would accrue to the landscape from the scheme and from their assistance with the conversion of the courtyard buildings, which are at the lower end of importance as a heritage asset. Accordingly, this aspect of the scheme would not comply with the Framework policy approach to development in the countryside. This is a significant drawback of the proposal.
35. As a consequence, I conclude that this would mean that the overall harm resulting from the proposal would be substantial and it would not outweigh the combined benefits of the scheme which I consider should afford moderate weight. It follows that the scheme as a whole would conflict with Policy KS2 of the Core Strategy which sets the strategy for the location of development across the plan area. The proposal would thereby not comply with the

development plan when considered as a whole and material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made otherwise.

Other Matters

36. The appellant has raised concerns with the approach of the Council when it dealt with the application, including the requests for further information even though the application was subsequently refused on matters of principle. Also highlighted is the time taken for the application to be determined which was such that by that point in time the Council was then able to demonstrate a five year housing land supply and the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in the Framework was not engaged. While I understand these concerns, the background issues with how the Council dealt with the application are not matters for me at the appeal stage which I have considered on its merits.

Conclusion

37. For the reasons given above, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

David Wyborn

INSPECTOR