



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 May 2022

by Jonathan Edwards BSc(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 May 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/21/3287840

Fosburys Field, Crowood Lane, Ramsbury, Wiltshire SN8 2PU

- 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 and Mrs Mabbett against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref PL/2021/08120, dated 18 August 2021, was refused by notice dated 21 October 2021.
 - The development proposed is conversion and extension of stable block and barn to holiday letting accommodation.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are (i) the effect on the character and appearance of the area including whether the development would conserve or enhance the landscape and natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the AONB), and (ii) whether the development would be in a suitable location having regard to the policies of the Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015 (the CS), the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and accessibility.

Reasons

Effect on character and appearance of the area

3. The subject building is a stable block with doors that face onto a grass area between it and a barn that lies just outside the appeal site. There is a gated access from the road that leads into Ramsbury. The land surrounding the site is predominantly fields with hedgerows and mature trees. It is an attractive rural landscape, recognised as such through the AONB designation. The stable block and the site in general has a typical agricultural or equestrian character that reflects its countryside location. As such, the site contributes positively to the landscape beauty of the locality and of the AONB as a whole.
4. The proposal would introduce a new residential use onto the site, albeit holiday accommodation. While it would not be occupied by the same household on a permanent basis, potentially the unit would be used by visitors over significant periods of the year.
5. The extent of the defined appeal site includes a large part of the grassed area to the front. It is likely that this would be used for sitting out and outdoor recreation and so it is probable that items such as garden furniture would be placed on this area. The amount of paraphernalia may be less for holiday

accommodation compared to someone's permanent home. Also, the current lawful use of the site could lead to vehicles and agricultural or equestrian equipment being kept on the external areas. Nevertheless, outdoor activities associated with the proposal would introduce an element of domesticity which would be uncharacteristic of the site and its surroundings.

6. Moreover, the development includes various alterations to the stable including an extension to the front. I understand that the design of the development has been amended from that considered by an Inspector under a previous appeal relating to the site¹. Even so, the proposed works would remove the stable doorway features and the roof overhang above which help give the building its distinctive rural appearance. In contrast, the development would appear bulkier, plainer and somewhat domestic with a number of windows and a front door. The alterations would retain little indication of the stable use but instead they would emphasise the proposed holiday accommodation purpose.
7. Views into the site from the road are limited due to the roadside vegetation and the gate, although there would be sight of the proposed accommodation and green area if the gate was left open. The interior of the site is largely unseen from a nearby public footpath due to boundary vegetation and the slope of the land. However, notwithstanding any additional planting, it is likely the development would be visible from the adjacent fields, although these would not provide public vantage points. As such, the development would have only a localised visual effect. Nonetheless, where seen, it would introduce a clearly recognisable residential aspect to the site which would undermine the rural character of the area.
8. For these reasons, I conclude the development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area and the landscape and natural beauty of the AONB. In these regards, it would not accord with the CS Core Policies 51 and 57. Amongst other things, these seek to ensure development responds positively to the natural environment and protects landscape character.

Suitability of location

9. CS Core Policies 1 and 2 set out settlement and delivery strategies which in general terms look to focus new development at towns and villages. CS Core Policy 14 identifies Ramsbury as a large village but the appeal site lies outside the defined settlement boundary. In such locations, Core Policy 2 states planning permission will not be granted for development unless one of the circumstances identified in paragraph 4.25 of the CS applies. These include development related to tourism, such as the appeal scheme.
10. CS Core Policy 39 is supportive of visitor facilities provided they are located in or close to large villages. The term "close to" is not defined under Core Policy 39. Therefore, it is a matter of planning judgment whether the proposal would comply with the policy requirements, having regard to the situation on the ground.
11. In this case, the development would not be far away from the settlement and buildings within the village can be seen from the appeal site. As such, I find the development would be close to Ramsbury and so it would be in a permissible

¹ Appeal decision reference number APP/Y3940/W/20/3244816.

location under the terms of Core Policy 39. This finding is consistent with the previous appeal Inspector's comments that the site is relatively close to the village.

12. CS Core Policies 60 and 61 seek to locate new development so as to reduce the need to travel by car and to encourage the use of sustainable transport alternatives. Facilities within the village, including bus stops, would be within a reasonable walking distance from the development. The road between the site and the village is not ideal for pedestrians as it is quite narrow and has no pavement. Also it is unlit and so unlikely to be attractive to pedestrians in the dark. However, the nearby public footpath leads across the fields to Whittonditch Road where there is a pavement that leads into the village. Therefore, an alternative safer route would exist for visitors to walk between the holiday accommodation and local facilities, albeit that this is also unlit.
13. The previous appeal Inspector found the site's location would significantly reduce the opportunities to use sustainable modes of transport. However, that decision relates to a permanent residential dwelling, not holiday accommodation as currently proposed. Unlike occupiers of a permanent home, it is unlikely that visitors to the proposed development would need to make regular trips to schools, places of employment and higher order shopping facilities. As such, this current scheme is not directly comparable to that dismissed at appeal and so I am not bound to reach the same conclusion on the matter of accessibility.
14. Moreover, CS Core Policy 39 is permissive of tourist facilities in locations that have reasonable access to services, but not necessarily by sustainable modes of transport. This approach is consistent with the terms of the Framework which recognises that sites to meet business needs in rural areas may have to be found beyond existing settlements in locations not well served by public transport. In light of this policy context, the short distance from the site to facilities and bus stops in the village is a point in favour of the development.
15. In light of the above factors, I conclude the proposal would be in a suitable location having regard to the development plan policies, the Framework and accessibility. In these respects, it would accord with CS Core Policies 1, 2 and 14 as it would be permitted under the terms of CS Core Policy 39. Also, in general terms, it would accord with CS Core Policies 60 and 61.

Other Matters

16. The proposed development would be acceptable in terms of its effects on living conditions of existing residents, biodiversity and highway safety. Acceptability in these regards is a neutral factor rather than a benefit to which I attach positive weight in my assessment.
17. Through the conversion of an existing building, the development would make an effective use of the site. Also, it would generate short term construction employment and would potentially create longer term jobs. It is likely that visitors to the accommodation would help support local businesses and tourist destinations in the wider area. However, the overall economic benefits would be modest given that the development would provide only a single unit.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

18. I have found the proposal would be in a suitable location having regard to CS policies and the Framework. However, it would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and would fail to enhance or conserve the landscape beauty of the AONB. As such, the development would not accord with the CS when read as a whole. The benefits are of insufficient weight to justify granting planning permission contrary to the provisions of the development plan. Therefore, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Jonathan Edwards

INSPECTOR