



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 February 2022

by Tamsin Law BSc MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 May 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/H1840/W/21/3284004

The Barn at Acton Hall Farm, Acton DY13 9TF

- 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 Cedarvale Developments Ltd against the decision of Wychavon District Council.
 - The application Ref 21/00046/FUL, dated 8 January 2021, was refused by notice dated 4 August 2021.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of existing agricultural barn and replacement with three no. detached dwellings with garages and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area and the significance of Acton Hall farmhouse, a non-designated heritage asset.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located on a lane that has a rural character with narrow carriageway, hedge, and tree lined edges, bound by agricultural land. Other than the appeal building, there is no built development on the northern side. The appeal site comprises a detached steel portal agricultural building and lies to the north of Acton Hall farmhouse and associated barn conversion complex. Whilst this existing agricultural building does not contribute positively to the area it is linked to the agricultural use of the site and the surrounding land and I noted that these were a common feature within the landscape during my site visit. Based on the evidence before me and what I viewed during my site visit the existing agricultural building has a neutral impact on the character and appearance of the area.
4. The area is characterised by dispersed development of a residential and agricultural nature surrounded by agricultural fields. The site is largely open to agricultural land with a wooded stream corridor located to the east and contains an agricultural building.
5. Whilst the site is located close to a number of settlements it is much more closely aligned with its surrounding rural characteristics than the more built-up development in nearby settlements. There are areas of dispersed housing development to the south west of the appeal site and a barn conversion complex to the south. The dispersed dwellings to the south west front on to a

highway and are set within their own landscaped plots in an informal layout. Whilst these add a residential element to the area, their dispersed nature ensures the area retains its rural characteristics. Whilst the barn conversions may have been heavily altered, they have retained an agricultural appearance and layout and can easily be read as historic rural buildings associated with Acton Hall farmhouse.

6. The proposed development would introduce three detached dwellings and associated development. The construction of dwellings clustered in a formal cul-de-sac arrangement would appear at odds with the surrounding dispersed rural character of the area. Along with the other domestic paraphernalia that would be likely to appear, the proposed development would significantly change the appearance of the site, having a suburbanising effect upon it. The proposal would therefore appear as an incongruous addition to the area, adversely affecting the rural character and appearance of the site and its surroundings. Whilst the appellant is content for conditions relating to materials, landscaping and biodiversity to be attached, these would not overcome the harm identified in relation to the location, scale and layout of the proposed development.
7. The appellant does not dispute, that Acton Hall farmhouse is a non-designated heritage asset. Paragraph 203 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) states that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale and harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
8. Acton Hall farmhouse derives its significance from its historic use as a farmhouse and rural setting. The spaciousness and agricultural nature of the surrounding land and existing building provides an important link to the historic use of Acton Hall farmhouse. Whilst the neighbouring barn conversions have been altered and extended, they retain an agricultural appearance and layout which do not detract from the setting or significance of Acton Hall farmhouse. The existing agricultural building is a more recent addition to the landscape than Acton Hall farmhouse and the associated barns, and whilst this does not contribute positively to the setting of Acton Hall farmhouse, it is associated with the rural historic use of the surrounding land and therefore has a neutral impact on the setting and significance of Acton Hall farmhouse.
9. The development of three suburban dwellings would erode the rural character and appearance of the area which contributes to the significance of Acton Hall farmhouse. As such, the proposal would have a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the area and the significance of this non designated heritage asset.
10. The proposal would therefore conflict with the South Worcestershire Development Plan (2016) (SWDP) Policies SWDP6, SWDP21, SWDP24 and SWDP25 which seek, amongst other things, to ensure that development reflects the given characteristics of the site in terms of its appearance and function and conserves and enhances the significance of non-designated heritage assets. The proposed development would also be contrary to paragraphs 130 and of the Framework that seek, amongst other things, to ensure developments are visually attractive and sympathetic to local character.

Other Matters

11. The main parties accept that there is a 'fallback' position, whereby the existing building could be converted to 5 dwellings. The appellant has pointed to the landscaping, height and terraced style development of the aforementioned fallback position as having a negative impact on the character and appearance of the area. From the plans provided with the submission it would largely retain its agricultural appearance, and whilst it would be taller than the proposed dwellings, would appear as a rural building in a countryside setting. Whilst the area of soft landscaping would increase, this would not be by much and would not prevent the suburban appearance of three dwellings in this rural setting.
12. I have had regard to the fact that both the fallback position and proposed development could generate additional domestic paraphernalia that could have a harmful impact on the area. The fallback position would see paraphernalia associated with 5 dwellings and the proposed development 3 dwellings. Whilst there would be the potential for a reduction in domestic paraphernalia associated with the proposed development, it would be associated with three structures, rather than the single structure that would appear in the landscape with the fallback. As such, the domestic paraphernalia could be spread over a larger area.
13. Having regard to the above, I consider that the proposed development would have a greater harmful impact on the character and appearance of the area than the fallback position. Therefore, the potential fallback does not weigh in favour of the proposal.

Planning Balance

14. I have found that the proposal has a harmful impact with regards to the character and appearance of the area and the setting and significance of Acton Hall farmhouse. A balanced judgement is required having regard to the scale and harm to the significance of the heritage asset.
15. The proposed development would provide some benefits, such as a commuted sum for affordable housing, sustainable drainage, energy performance, biodiversity and environmental improvements. Additionally there would be socio-economic benefits in terms of the creation of employment opportunities within the construction industry. Nevertheless, the benefits would be limited due to the small scale nature of the proposed development. I therefore give them limited weight and they do not outweigh the conflict with the development plan.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Tamsin Law

INSPECTOR