

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 June 2022

by C McDonagh BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 July 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/W/22/3293518

Shay House Barn, Catlow Road, Slaidburn BB7 3AQ

- 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 M Handley against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 3/2021/1079, dated 20 October 2021, was refused by notice dated 16 December 2021.
 - The development proposed is conversion of barn into one residential dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are as follows:
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host building and landscape, including the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and
 - Whether the site is a suitable location for housing, having regard to the development strategy of the plan area.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. The appeal site comprises a detached stone barn and adjoining yard, located circa 90m from the main cluster of buildings of Shay House Farm. The barn is sited adjacent an access track which runs between the farm steading and the public highway to the east. The local landscape is rural in character, with expanses of open countryside in all directions consisting of rolling pastureland enclosed by traditional stone walls and mature trees and hedgerows, while there are areas of woodland also evident. Built form is sporadic and includes other farms and their associated outbuildings.
4. The appeal building is of traditional construction, formed of sandstone walls and a pitched slate roof. The barn has a tall opening in the centre of the east elevation, with smaller openings to either side. There is also a lean-to extension to the south elevation, while a small foldyard is enclosed by a stone wall. Although the barn shows some outward signs of deterioration, it is nevertheless an attractive example of a traditional stone barn of its time, some of which are still evident in varying conditions throughout the AONB. It

therefore makes a positive contribution to the rural landscape of the area and the scenic beauty of the AONB.

5. The proposal seeks to convert the barn into a detached dwelling, with the existing lean-to roof replaced to form a single-storey extension. Other works required include hardstanding for a new access track and parking, a garden within the existing yard and several new openings for windows and doors.
6. While the proposed single-storey extension would occupy the footprint of the existing lean-to structure, its new roof pitch would reach approximately halfway up the height of that elevation and include a significant increase in glazing. These features would erode the simple architectural form and rural appearance of the barn in a harmful manner. When seen from the east, the side elevation would read as an incongruous addition that is inconsistent with the built form of the host building.
7. Moreover, the proposal would require a significant amount of hardstanding to facilitate access from the existing track and the parking of vehicles in the curtilage of the dwelling. While a track may have previously existed in this location, as suggested by the satellite imagery, from my observations this since has largely been reclaimed by the land at the time of my site visit. This would be compounded by the inevitable formalisation of boundary treatments and introduction of domestic paraphernalia such as sheds, washing lines and outdoor furniture. This would represent a significant urban encroachment that would further erode the agricultural character of the site and the largely undeveloped qualities of the wider landscape.
8. I appreciate that steps were taken during the design process to ensure the curtilage around the building would not be expanded. Moreover, native planting is proposed to two sides of the curtilage as well as part of the northern elevation facing the access track. Although there is merit to reusing an existing building for housing, the domestication of the barn would be evident to users of the footpath along the access track and longer-range views to the east, particularly the public highway. Although it is claimed that the conversion would secure the long-term integrity of the building and its continued contribution to the scenic landscape of the AONB, I have identified harm as a result of the proposed conversion. As such this would not weigh in favour of the scheme.
9. Furthermore, the barn is located a significant distance from the main steading of Shay House Farm. The buildings of the farm are located to the west of a band of trees which line Croasdale Brook and are separated from one another by only a few metres. As such they read as a cluster of buildings. The appeal barn is located to the east of the tree lined brook at a distance which the Council gives as 90m. While the barn may appear to be backdropped by farm buildings when viewed from the east, this would not be the case from other directions and given its location in a field adjacent the farm buildings, it appears visually separate from the main cluster.
10. To conclude on this main issue, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the host building and the area, including the scenic beauty of the AONB. This would be contrary to Policies DMH3 and DMH4 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy 2008-2028 (CS) (adopted December 2014). Together, these seek to preserve and conserve the AONB, ensure that the general design of conversions of buildings to dwellings should be in keeping with their

surroundings whilst barn conversions will be supported where there are no materially damaging effects on the landscape qualities of the area. The proposal would also be contrary to paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which advises great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, among others, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.

Whether Suitable Location

11. Key Statement DS1 of the CS sets out the spatial development strategy for the plan area. This seeks to concentrate new housing development within an identified strategic site located to the south of Clitheroe towards the A59 and the principal settlements of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley. In addition to these, it is stipulated that development will be directed towards Tier 1 Villages, which are the most sustainable of the 32 defined settlements in the plan area.
12. Policy DMG2 of the CS states that outside of defined settlement areas, development proposals must meet at least one of the six given exceptions. These include demonstrating a local need for housing, buildings for agriculture or forestry or whether development is necessary for the local economy or social wellbeing. Similarly, Policy DMH3 states the development in the open countryside or AONB will be limited to, among other things, the appropriate conversion of buildings to dwellings providing they are suitably located, their form and general design are in keeping with their surroundings and they are capable of conversion without the need for complete or substantial reconstruction.
13. There does not appear to be any dispute between the parties as to whether the building is capable of conversion. From the evidence before me and my own observations on the site visit, I see no reason to disagree. However, I have already concluded that the design of the conversion would not be in keeping with the host building or local landscape.
14. The appeal site is located in open countryside outside of any identified settlement. Slaidburn is the nearest village, which is evidently located some 2 kilometres to the south and identified in Policy DS1 of the CS as a Tier 2 settlement. It has a limited range of services and facilities, including a public house, post office, primary school and village hall.
15. Given the remote location of the appeal site and lack of public transport in the area, access to these nearest services and facilities would involve narrow, unlit rural roads which in the direction of Slaidburn have no pavements. The distances involved and the nature of the roads would therefore be likely to deter walking and cycling, particularly after dark and in inclement weather. As such it is reasonable to conclude that the future occupants of the proposal would be heavily reliant on the use of private vehicles to access the facilities and services in Slaidburn or elsewhere. I note the appellant agrees with this position as it relates to private vehicles. This would be the least sustainable form of transport, and while there would be a boost to local services and facilities this would be minimal from one dwelling. As such I cannot conclude that the proposal would be suitably located.
16. Moreover, there is nothing before me to demonstrate local need or that the conversion is required for agriculture. It is indicated that the son of a nearby

farmer would occupy the dwelling so that they could live closer to the farm to help their family. However, the application was not submitted as a dwelling for a rural worker, which would have its own requirements and stipulations. Moreover, there is no legal mechanism before me to secure the occupancy of the dwelling in this manner were it to be brought forward. It would be an open market dwelling and as such, this carries little weight in favour of the scheme. Although there would be a small boost to local services and facilities, including the local school, this would be limited as a result of the introduction of one dwelling and there is no evidence that this is 'essential' to the local economy or social wellbeing.

17. I am aware that the Framework does not preclude dwellings outside of defined settlements as a rule, and paragraph 80 states that local planning authorities should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless certain circumstances apply. One such circumstance is section (b), where development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets.
18. The appellant states that the barn should be considered a non-designated heritage asset due to its historic and aesthetic value. In its current state, I have concluded that the barn makes a valuable contribution to the rural landscape character of the local area and the AONB as a whole. The appeal is accompanied by a heritage statement (Stephen Haigh Buildings Archaeologist, February 2022) of which I have had regard.
19. The barn has not been identified as a non-designated heritage asset by the Council as the local planning authority in a maintained local list. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) states with regard to non-designated heritage assets that they can be identified through a number of processes, including as part of the decision-making process on planning applications, for example, following archaeological investigations¹.
20. However, there is nothing substantive before me to indicate why it should be considered a non-designated heritage asset other than its age and historic association to the area. Moreover, the heritage statement advises that the building has a low, but relevant, level of heritage significance. While I have agreed that the barn has aesthetic value with regards to its contribution to the local landscape and the AONB, I have identified harm to the character and appearance of the barn due to the changes proposed, while there is nothing before me to indicate why a dwelling would represent its optimum viable use, despite its lack of suitability for modern farming. Although my attention is drawn to a similar barn conversion in the same Council area², I have nothing before me as to its significance. As such, regardless of whether the location would be 'isolated' in the context of paragraph 80 of the Framework, it would not meet this exception.
21. For the reasons outlined above, I conclude that the appeal site is within open countryside where it has poor access to facilities and other services. Future residents would therefore be required to use private motor vehicles to access these and therefore the proposal would not constitute a suitable location for housing. This would not accord with Policies DMG2 and DMH3 of the CS or

¹ Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 18a-040-20190723

² 3/2018/0079

paragraph 80 of the Framework as detailed in the foregoing sections of this report.

Other Matters

22. The submitted bat surveys stipulate that there is no evidence of bat activity in the building and bats would therefore not be harmed. However, a lack of harm in this regard, or other aspects of the proposal, would neither weigh in favour of the scheme or against.

Conclusion

23. Although there is some merit to the addition of a dwelling to the Council's stock, a small boost to services and facilities and the re-use of an existing building, these are of limited weight would not outweigh the harm I have identified. For the reasons given above, having taken account of the development plan as a whole, along with all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should therefore be dismissed.

C McDonagh

INSPECTOR