



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 June 2022

by Helen Davies MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25th July 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/W/21/3292630

College Farm Barn, Garford, Oxfordshire OX13 5PF

- 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 Matthew Pearce against the decision of Vale of White Horse District Council.
 - The application Ref P21/V1707/FUL, dated 8 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 7 September 2021.
 - The development proposed is erection of a single two storey separate private dwellinghouse with attached garage and modification of existing field and site access and the extension of the residential garden area.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - Whether the appeal site would be a suitable location for new housing;
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area; and
 - The effect of the proposal on heritage assets including those of archaeological interest.

Reasons

Location

3. The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 (LP) seeks to ensure the delivery of sustainable development by focusing new houses in towns and larger villages which have the greatest availability of services and facilities. It also allows for proportionate development, to meet local need, in specified smaller villages. Whilst Garford is a small village, it is not specified under Policy CP3 of the LP, so in terms of current planning policy, Garford and therefore the site, is considered to form part of the open countryside.
4. Policy CP4 of the LP sets out that in the open countryside, development will not be appropriate unless specifically supported by other relevant local or national planning policies. No substantive evidence has been presented to demonstrate that the proposal would be supported by relevant planning policies which allow for new housing in the countryside, such as for affordable housing or rural enterprise dwellings. However, as the proposal would be located adjacent to

existing dwellings, it would not be classed as an isolated dwelling in the countryside.

5. I am informed by the Council that public transport is limited, and I saw nothing during my site visit to lead me to a different view. It was also evident from my visit that there are very limited services and facilities in the village and immediate surrounding area. This means that future residents would be highly reliant on a private vehicle to access necessary services and facilities, which is the least sustainable form of transport. It may be possible, on occasion, to walk or cycle to the nearest services and facilities (or those in settlements further afield). However that is likely to be unwelcoming given the rural context of the site, particularly during inclement weather or outside of daylight.
6. I note the reference made to other developments in Garford, including at Dairy Meadow, Millets Farm and College Farm Cottages. I have been presented with no details of these developments or the timing and circumstances of any associated planning permission. I have viewed the examples on site and given that the current LP was adopted in late 2019, it is likely that most of these developments would have been determined on the basis of previous development plan policies. In addition, they may have been subject to material considerations which do not apply to the proposal before me and direct comparisons are not easily made. I have determined this appeal on its own merits, circumstances, and situation, in accordance with policies in the current development plan for the area.
7. I conclude that the appeal site would be an unsuitable location for new housing, having regard to the local plan and the accessibility of services and facilities. It would fail to comply with Policies CP3 and CP4 of the LP which set out the settlement hierarchy and guide development first and foremost towards larger settlements with a range of services and facilities.

Character and appearance

8. The existing dwelling at College Farm Barn is a converted stone barn with two storey and single storey elements. The dwellings on the adjoining site are single storey stone former agricultural buildings. Both sites largely retain the materials, scale and detailing of their former use, with modest extensions. Opposite the site is Grade II listed College Farm House. It is a traditional stone dwelling with some more modern additions. This collection of dwellings forms an attractive edge to the village, beyond which is open fields.
9. The proposed dwelling is described as one and a half storeys, but its scale, height and footprint would be substantial. Despite the use of hipped roofs, it would present comparatively bulky elevations when viewed from all angles. This, combined with the fact that the site is at a modestly higher level than the existing dwelling, means the proposal would visibly dominate the site and its immediate surroundings.
10. Furthermore, the proposal would have hipped roofs with varied ridge heights and multiple hipped dormers creating a complex roof form. There are examples of complex roof forms elsewhere in the village, but in the immediate surrounding area within which the proposal would be viewed, dwellings are typically quite simple in design with gabled roofs reflecting an understated rural aesthetic. Small dormer windows are common across the village but are generally gabled and few in number. The proposal would include multiple and

hipped dormers which is uncharacteristic of the village. As such, despite the use of suitable materials, the proposed dwelling would not reflect or reinforce local identity in terms of form or detailing and would not respond positively to the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding dwellings.

11. Most of the trees which would be removed are to the centre of the site. The trees along the southern boundary would largely be retained, providing a good level of screening when viewed from the south. The proposed replacement of leylandii hedging with native hedging to the rear boundary and the planting of new trees to the boundary with the existing dwelling would inevitably take some time to establish. Therefore, even with a condition to secure timely tree and hedge planting, there would inevitably be a significant period of time before screening was established. During that time, the dwelling would be highly visible from the road to the front and the paddock to the rear, as well as from neighbouring properties. This added built form in what is currently a mature garden would reduce the pleasant rural quality of this edge of village location.
12. There is some depth to sections of the village, on the opposite side of the road through the village, where there are a few short side roads. On the same side of the road as the appeal site, however, the centre of the village is predominantly shallow and linear in form with houses fronting onto the road. There is some deeper built form on the same side of the road towards the site, but this is generally converted agricultural buildings. The proposal would create an entirely new built form located behind an existing dwelling. It would have no direct road frontage being accessed by a long drive. It would create built form that was deeper than the adjoining sites. I have not been made aware of any other examples of dwellings built in gardens in the village and could see no obvious examples during my site visit. As such the grain and layout of the proposal would be untypical of the village and not in keeping with the predominant settlement pattern.
13. Regardless of the location of the village road sign and speed indicators, the built form of the village ends at College Farm Barn. There is a clear boundary between land in domestic use and land in agricultural use formed by the line of trees along the southern boundary of the site. The access, drive and extended boundary wall for the proposal would be beyond this clear boundary, outside of the garden in a field to the side of College Farm Barn. A simple field gate access already exists from the road into the field, and the new wall would be visually similar to existing boundary walls. Despite this, the proposal would introduce a much more formal domestic access along with a gravelled drive where there is currently a grassed field edge. This would significantly domesticate a section of what is currently an agricultural field, resulting in the encroachment of residential use and built form into the surrounding countryside. The site would also extend into an area to the rear that is not currently garden.
14. Taken together, the above factors mean that the proposal would not physically or visually integrate with its surroundings and would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area. Consequently, it would not comply with Policy CP37 of the Local Plan 2031 which requires that development will be of a high-quality design that responds positively to the site and its surroundings. Furthermore, it would not accord with Paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework)

which sets out that planning decisions should ensure that development is well-designed.

Heritage assets

15. The application site is located in an area of archaeological interest and potential, as confirmed in comments from the County Archaeologist. I am informed that archaeological trenching at nearby developments revealed evidence of a double ditched enclosure dating to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The appellant states they are unaware of any archaeological remains on site, but no desk-based assessment or archaeological field evaluation by a suitably qualified person has been submitted with this appeal. Without such information it is not possible to assess the need for investigation, or the potential options for minimising or avoiding damage to archaeological remains, should they be present on site.
16. The appellant has suggested that a desk-based assessment or archaeological field evaluation could be secured via a planning condition. The outcome of any such investigation would potentially impact on the deliverability or location and layout of any proposal, along with potential conditions that may be necessary to make the development proposed acceptable in planning terms. Therefore, it would not be appropriate in this case to leave the securing of archaeological details to a planning condition. Notwithstanding this, even if a condition to secure archaeological details were considered appropriate, it would not overcome the other reasons that the proposal is unacceptable.
17. In its current natural state, the appeal site has some contribution to the setting of the Grade II listed building at nearby College Farm House (by virtue of representing physically the historic connection between the settlement and its rural environs). However, that connection is not readily discernible on account of intervening development and change to the surrounding context of the listed building over time. Moreover, the appeal site represents a small fraction of the setting of the listed building. By consequence, notwithstanding my reasoning in respect of character and appearance previously, I am of the view that the effect of the scheme insofar as significance and setting is concerned would be so limited so as to be neutral.
18. I conclude that in the absence of any archaeological assessment, in an area of archaeological interest and potential, the proposal does not comply with policy DP39 of the LP or paragraph 194 of the Framework. In summary these policies seek to protect heritage assets, including those of archaeological interest.

Other Matters

19. I have been presented with no detail of any Parish Council meeting minutes or representations on the Local Plan, but I note their lack of objection to the proposal subject to this appeal. This does not overcome the failure to comply with current local planning policy and the harm that would result.
20. Part of the site is outside of land currently in use as garden. The Framework sets out that previously developed or brownfield land excludes land in built-up areas such as residential gardens. Regardless of whether or not the main body of the site can be considered as brownfield land, any benefits of using a part-brownfield site would not outweigh the lack of policy compliance and harm identified.

21. The appellant notes that most of the site is already in residential use and the proposal would sit within a generous plot and not impact on the privacy or amenity of neighbours. These matters are not in dispute but do not outweigh the harm identified in other respects. I have insufficient information to form a judgement on the status of the existing gate between the field and the site, but this does not impact on my decision.
22. I appreciate that the appellant would like to have been informed directly that an archaeological evaluation would be needed. However, I am informed that comments from the County Archaeological Services, stating this would be needed, were placed on the Council website. Consequently, the information was made publicly available as required. It is not uncommon for details to be required in addition to those necessary for validation, once assessment and consultation has commenced.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given above and taking into account the development plan as a whole and all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Helen Davies

INSPECTOR