



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 July 2022

by R Sabu BA(Hons), MA, BArch, PgDip, RIBA, ARB

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15th August 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/P0119/W/21/3282702

Hill House Cottage, Frith Lane, Wickwar GL12 8PB

- 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 J Jones against the decision of South Gloucestershire Council.
 - The application Ref P20/10660/F, dated 10 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 12 March 2021.
 - The development proposed is described as, 'construction of new country house of exceptional design (Paragraph 79 house)'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr and Mrs J Jones against South Gloucestershire Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. The National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) was updated since the Council issued its Decision Notice. Apart from the omission of the requirement to be innovative, the wording of paragraph 80(e) of the revised Framework is the same as the equivalent paragraph of the 2019 Framework upon which the application was determined. I have necessarily based my assessment on the revised Framework.
4. As the proposal relates to the setting of listed buildings, I have had special regard to section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposed development would meet the policy exception for new dwellings in the countryside as set out in paragraph 80e of the Framework; and
 - the effect of the proposed development on the setting and significance of nearby listed buildings.

Reasons

6. Paragraph 80 of the Framework restricts the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of a number of circumstances apply. The circumstance relevant to this appeal is part e) of the paragraph: the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:

- is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and
- would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

Truly outstanding and reflecting the highest standards in architecture

7. The existing building on the site, Hill House Cottage, consists of the ruins of a historic farmstead. The primary areas of surviving built fabric include the stone walls of the former cart store to the north of the site which consist of gable walls, a low-level wall and an open-fronted south elevation. A long west facing wall is orientated perpendicular to the former cart store and is supported by large stone buttresses. Small areas of flank wall of the original cottage lie on the south side of the buildings.
8. A number of large trees have grown on the site including two large Ash trees to the east of the buildings, another Ash tree to the west and a Crab Apple tree to the south.
9. The proposal consists of a collection of single and two storey buildings arranged roughly in a courtyard layout incorporating the existing buildings. The guest annex would be located within the stone walls of the former cart store to the north of the site while a swimming pool would be sited adjacent to the long west facing wall. These buildings would be single storey with pitched roofs that would project a small distance above the existing stone walls.
10. There are a number of small openings in the west facing stone wall. The proposed building would introduce aluminium framed glazing behind the openings. These would be a larger size than the openings to reveal part of the stone from within the internal space. In addition, the deep internal window reveals would slant in towards the openings focussing the eye toward the windows and framing the views to the surrounding landscape from the inside.
11. The gutter along the west facing wall would be set behind the stone wall such that the clerestory glazing and standing seam zinc cladding would appear to rise from behind the stone wall rather than being fixed to it. The glazed corner of the swimming pool building would be set away from the stone wall such that the stone wall would appear to project in front of the new building and frame a view towards the north.
12. The swimming pool building would be connected to the existing wall of the former cottage by a glazed link. The existing stone wall that appears to have contained a bread oven would be extended vertically with a Cotswold limestone finish to form a chimney breast that would support a double height vaulted roof form with a rooflight above the fireplace.

13. As such, the distinction between the old and new parts of the building would be clear and the sensitive detailed design of these parts of the proposal would enable the character of the existing walls to be retained.
14. The subtle detailing between the new and old parts of the building would result in the new buildings appearing to rise from behind the stone fabric in a manner sensitive to the existing building while distinguishing the new. The technical complexity of the detailing of these aspects of the scheme elevates the design above common barn conversions as referenced by the Council. As such the detailing of the junctions between the existing building and the proposed buildings would be truly outstanding reflecting the highest standards in architecture.
15. However, the largest component of the overall dwelling would be the part two-storey, part single story, mostly new build main house to the south of the site. The two-storey main house would have a dual pitch roof with standing seam zinc cladding that would wrap around the upper floor of the building. The ground floor would be clad in Cotswold limestone and timber cladding and would have extensive areas of full height glazed screens and doors.
16. The proposal would appear as a modern interpretation of a typical arrangement of simple barns. However, the extensive use of glazing and links between the buildings would result in a residential character and the appearance of a large dwelling. Accordingly, there would be no substantial aspects of the design of the main house that would elevate it above a commonplace barn conversion.
17. In terms of materials, other than the Cotswold limestone, there is little evidence that the materials, particularly the standing seam zinc cladding, have been inspired by the local landscape. Timber cladding would be highly likely to weather and its appearance over time could not be guaranteed. While the species of timber for the cladding and columns could be secured via a suitably worded condition, there is little evidence before me to demonstrate that the use of these materials would result in a building of exceptional design quality.
18. The proposed garage would also be clad in standing seam zinc with timber clad walls. The dual pitched roof would echo that of the single storey part of the main house. However, given its siting, it would appear as a superfluous structure of a relatively unremarkable design. Moreover, there is no evidence of a structure of this size and siting historically on the site.
19. I note the Environmental Study and M&E Strategy. The energy strategy for the site includes the use of a ground source heat pump, mechanical ventilation heat recovery, deep window reveals and integrated photovoltaic panels. While these measures would seek to mitigate the environmental effects of the development, they would not result in outstanding design.
20. Overall, there is little substantial evidence before me to demonstrate that the form, massing and materials of the main house and garage would be of exceptional design.
21. In terms of layout, the scheme would retain the mature trees on the site including within the proposed courtyard. The glazed link and double height glazing at the main entrance of the main house would allow visibility through the site, to the surrounding landscape and to the retained mature trees. These features would aid the integration of the dwelling with the landscape.

22. The retention of the Ash trees and Apple tree on the site are key aspects of the landscape design. The wider landscaping includes enhancement of the margin to the agricultural fields through the planting of meadow species and extension of existing hedgerow and small woodland blocks. The entrance garden would also include meadow elements and perennial gardens. In addition, the landscaping proposals include an open pond, wet woodland and a traditional orchard that would provide ecological enhancement to the area.
23. The annex and swimming pool parts of the building would largely sit behind the existing building when viewed from long distances to the west. However, notwithstanding the landscaping proposals, given its two-storey size and form, the dominating aspect of the overall proposal would be the main house which would be significantly larger than the existing buildings, would not be of an exceptional design and would appear unduly prominent in the landscape.
24. As such, the proposal as a whole would not be truly outstanding and would not reflect the highest standards in architecture.

Help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas.

25. The detailing of the junctions between the existing building and the swimming pool and annex would be hidden within the build-up of the walls. However, the interaction between the old and new elements of the building would be at least partially seen from the public footpath and may inspire others to consider retaining and integrating existing buildings in the countryside into proposed developments. As such, the proposal would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas.

Significantly enhance its immediate setting.

26. Although the existing stone structures on the site have fallen into disrepair, they have become a strong part of the existing landscape character. The immediate setting of the site is characterised by arable fields and the footpath which passes through the site on a north south axis. As I observed during my site visit, the stone buildings appear as a serendipitous aspect of the journey along the footpath when travelling south from Frith Lane.
27. The proposed rerouting of the footpath would alter the journey around the site. While the exceptional detailing of the annex and swimming pool may be partially appreciated from the footpath, the two-storey massing of the main house would appear dominant. The double height entrance glazing may allow some views through the site. However, given the solid roof and depth of the main house, views through the site from the footpath would be limited in this respect. Given the siting of the garage, the views through the glazed link would also be primarily seen from within the courtyard rather than from the area surrounding the site including the public footpath.
28. Given its prominent position on Wickwar Ridge, the form and materials of the main house would dominate the view from the west as well as south and southwest and appear unduly prominent in the landscape. The main house, given its form, massing and materials would not appear particularly exceptional as discussed earlier. Furthermore, given the extensive use of glazing, the proposal would have a residential rather than agricultural character. As such, the prominence of the main house in the landscape would not significantly enhance its immediate setting.

29. The landscaping proposal may partially soften the impact of the form in the landscape. However, the landscaping proposals would not uplift the immediate setting of the site to a significant degree sufficient to mitigate the prominence of the ordinary form and materials of the main house.
30. Accordingly, the proposed development would not significantly enhance its immediate setting.

Be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

31. The site is identified in the Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (LCA) as being within Area 5 - Wickwar Ridge and Vale landscape character area. Moreover, it lies on the west facing slope of Wickwar Ridge which forms a distinctive feature in views across the adjacent Yate Vale character area and provides for expansive westward views across the landscapes to the north of Yate.
32. The site lies adjacent to arable farmland that slopes down to the west away from the ridge and is interspersed by hedgerow. However, despite more recent development and having spent time in the area during my site inspection, the key defining characteristics of the local area are of mixed pasture and arable fields defined by hedgerows, trees and areas of woodland.
33. The landscaping proposals would include native species that would encourage local biodiversity. However, since the two-storey form and massing of the main house would appear unduly dominant in the landscape, it would not be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.
34. In summary, while some aspects of the proposed building would be truly outstanding and be of the highest architectural standard, overall, the proposal would fail to meet this criterion. I find that the scheme would help to raise the standards of design more generally in rural areas. However, given the unduly dominant effect of the main house on the landscape, the proposal would not significantly enhance its immediate setting and would not be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.
35. Consequently, the proposed development would not meet the policy exception for new dwellings in the countryside as set out in paragraph 80e of the Framework. It would also conflict with Policies CS5 and CS34 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan: Core Strategy 2006-2027 (Adopted) December 2013 (CS) which together require, among other things, that proposals protect, conserve and enhance the rural areas' distinctive character and beauty.
36. In addition, the proposal would conflict with Policy PSP40 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan: Policies, Sites and Places Plan Adopted November 2017 (PSP) which seeks development which would not have a harmful effect on the character of the countryside.
37. CS Policy CS4A relates to the presumption in favour of sustainable development and is therefore not directly relevant to this main issue.

Setting of listed buildings

38. The listing dates the Grade II* listed Frith Farmhouse and Bakehouse (Ref: 1128768) to the late 17th century and notes that it may incorporate an earlier building. The main building consists of a three gabled farmhouse constructed

largely of rubble with two storeys and accommodation in the roof space. The scale of the building signifies the high status of the surgeon for whom the property was originally built.

39. As such, the significance of the building, insofar as it relates to this appeal lies in the historic and evidential value of the property as an example of a high-class gabled gentry house.
40. The access to the site lies roughly opposite to the main farmhouse and leads to Hill House Cottage which the evidence indicates can be seen from the upper storeys of Frith Farmhouse. As such, the listed building is experienced in close proximity to the site and the site lies within its setting. Its small scale and the way it has blended into the landscape reinforces the prominence of the listed building in the area and contributes positively to the significance of the Farmhouse.
41. The existing buildings on the site are remains of single storey agricultural buildings. The two-storey main house of the proposal would dominate the site and appear prominent in the landscape. The visibility between Frith Farmhouse and the site may be partially screened by landscaping. However, given the significant increase in the scale of the buildings on the site, the proposal would detract from the prominence of the Frith Farmhouse, harmfully eroding its significance.
42. The Grade II listed Hall End Farmhouse (Ref: 1321123) is listed as dating from the early 17th century. It is a rendered vernacular farmhouse set within modern farm buildings. The building is also two storeys with three gables. The remodelling of the dwelling in 1688 also attests to the wealth of the owners.
43. Hillhouse Farmhouse is also a Grade II listed building (Ref: 1128773) that the listing dates to the early to mid-17th century. The building is rendered with slate roof and is also two storeys high.
44. As such, the significance of these buildings, insofar as they relate to this appeal lies in the evidence of prominent historic vernacular architecture and past patterns of use.
45. There is a clear view from Hall End Farm to the brow of the ridge and the west wall of the existing building on the site. Although existing and proposed trees may partially screen views to the proposed building, the increase in scale of the buildings on the site and the agricultural appearance of the two-storey main house would be clearly visible from the listed building. The proposal would therefore visually compete with Hall End Farm in this view and harmfully detract from the prominence of the listed building.
46. Hillhouse Farmhouse lies south of the site. The site lies within the setting of Hillhouse Farmhouse given the historic and current ownership of the site, listed building and surrounding area. There is limited intervisibility between the listed building and the site. However, the modest scale of the existing buildings is in keeping with the rural surroundings and contribute positively to the setting and significance of Hillhouse Farmhouse.
47. The proposal would result in a large, detached dwelling and some domestic paraphernalia that would urbanise the site and harmfully diminish the rural character of area that speaks to the significance of the listed building.

48. Consequently, the proposed development would fail to preserve the setting of nearby listed buildings thereby causing harm to their special interest.
49. Paragraph 199 of the Framework advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 200 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting and that any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification. Given the modest scale of the development, I find the harm to be less than substantial in this instance but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. Under such circumstances, paragraph 202 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The appellant is of the opinion that the proposal would be beneficial because of it would retain an interesting part of rural heritage.
50. The existing buildings are not nationally or locally listed buildings. However, the local Historic Environment Record identifies the building as "Barn Frith Lane Wickwar post medieval. A small building, probably a barn in a close was noted at this location on the 1st Edition OS map". As such, the existing building is a non-designated heritage asset. Paragraph 203 of the Framework requires that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application.
51. The Heritage Statement indicates that the cart store dates to the 18th century while later additions to the building date from the 19th and 20th century. While the building is in a dilapidated condition, it has blended into the landscape and provides a positive contribution to the character of the area. The remaining stone walls on the site provide some indication of the form and layout of the original buildings. While I note the suggestion of the former use as a tannery, from the evidence, there is no recorded history of such a use.
52. Therefore, the significance of the building, insofar as it relates to this appeal, lies in the evidence of a historic modest farmstead.
53. The proposal would bring the building back into use. On the other hand, the massing and layout of the main house and associated garage would be far larger than the size and layout of the historic buildings as indicated in the historic mapping. The main house, given its size and layout, would dominate the existing buildings when viewed from a number of directions. As such, overall, the proposal would have a neutral effect on the significance of Hill House Cottage.
54. The proposed dwelling would have 'A' rated environmental impact, would provide a dwelling to the local housing supply and there would be temporary economic benefits during the construction phase. Future occupiers would also contribute to the local community. Given the limited scale of development, these benefits would be limited.
55. Given the above and in the absence of any significant public benefit, I conclude that, on balance, the proposal would fail to preserve the setting of the Grade II* and II listed buildings. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 199 of the Framework and conflict with CS Policy CS9 and PSP Policy PSP17 that seek, among other things, to ensure that heritage assets are conserved, respected and enhanced in a manner appropriate to their

significance. As a result, the proposal would not be in accordance with the development plan.

Other Matters

56. I note the evidence regarding the extant permission on the site for change of use of barns to facilitate conversion to tourist accommodation. Given the evidence, it appears that works were commenced on site albeit some time ago and pre-commencement conditions were discharged. However, given the scale and massing of the main house, even if there is a more than theoretical possibility that the extant permission would be implemented, this matter has not altered my overall decision.
57. I note the other country houses approved by the Council that are referred to by the Appellant. However, these appear to be a different form, massing and scale to the proposal such that they are not directly comparable to the appeal scheme and have not altered my overall decision.
58. I recognise that the Appellant has engaged with Design: South West Review Panel, and I have had regard to their comments. I also note local support for the scheme. However, for the reasons given above, I disagree with their overall findings.

Conclusion

59. For the reasons given above, the proposed development would conflict with the development plan as a whole and in the absence of material considerations to indicate otherwise, the appeal is dismissed.

R Sabu

INSPECTOR