



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 January 2023

by K L Robbie BA (Hons) DipTP MTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 March 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/W/22/3308044

Cuckoo Hall, Higher Road, Longridge PR3 2YX

- 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 McLaughlin against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 3/2022/0012, dated 21 December 2021, was refused by notice dated 26 May 2022.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of existing agricultural buildings and 1no. residential property and the erection of 1no. replacement dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area, including the landscape and scenic beauty of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and
 - the loss of a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA).

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. The appeal site comprises a range of traditional whitewashed and natural stone farm buildings and associated hardstanding arranged in a cluster around a farmhouse with agricultural buildings to either side. The site is set back from Higher Road by a small paddock. It is located in an elevated position within a wider area of rolling, largely undeveloped countryside in the Forest of Bowland AONB.
4. The surrounding area is characterised predominantly by small groups of traditional residential and agricultural buildings dispersed across open countryside. The traditional nature of the buildings on the appeal site contributes positively and distinctively to the character and appearance of the area.
5. The statutory purpose of AONBs is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs.

6. The proposal is for the demolition of all the buildings and their replacement with a new dwelling which would be made up of four distinct building elements joined by glazed linking corridors. The central element of the proposed development would be approximately in the same location as the existing farmhouse on the site. The proposed building would extend closer to Higher Road than the current cluster of buildings.
7. Whilst the existing buildings are not prominent within the wider landscape, they are readily viewed from Higher Road, where they appear nestled into the landscape on approach from the west and are visible above the skyline on approach from the east, coming in and out of view as the road dips and turns on approach to the appeal site.
8. A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) submitted with the appeal concludes that the scale, volume, massing and design would be in keeping with the locality. However, replacing a range of traditional farm buildings with a substantial stone and more contemporary timber clad house would not be characteristic of this part of the AONB where most built development is both traditional and functional in nature and appearance. The proposal would see the existing modestly proportioned farmhouse and functionally attached agricultural buildings replaced with a large residential property. The proposed house would be much larger in scale than the existing farmhouse and would have the effect of urbanising the countryside setting when appreciated from localised viewpoints thereby harming the otherwise rural character of the area.
9. It may be the case, as the appellant suggests, that a volumetric comparison of the existing range of buildings reveals a smaller form than that which it would replace. However, in visual terms the replacement dwelling and its extensive hardstanding at the front would appear as a more substantial and urbanised form at odds with the more modest rural character of the existing farmhouse and its associated agricultural buildings. The proposal would result in an unacceptably sprawling and out of keeping replacement development. Consequently, the development would be out of character with its surroundings and therefore harmful to the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB.
10. Although some of the buildings on site appear dilapidated and the proposal would remove a static caravan, farm buildings of this nature are commonplace in rural settings and do not automatically detract from the character and appearance of the area. When considered as a whole, the proposed development would not assimilate well into its surroundings and would appear as an intrusive and harmful form of development in the rural setting and character of the area.
11. The proposal relies on significant woodland planting to mitigate its visual impact which would, in time, go some way to screen the dwelling and its substantial hardstanding from view from Higher Road. However, the regular shaped blocks of planting would appear unnatural in the landscape setting, and, in any event, such planting would not endure forever. I recognise that there are some man-made woodland planting blocks which are evident from Google satellite images of the area. Nevertheless, these are some distance away and are not appreciable on the ground in the vicinity of the appeal site. The appellant has suggested that landscaping plans could be further revised, however that is not the scheme that the Council considered, and I am obliged to come to a decision on the plans before me.

12. Furthermore, the increased extent of the residential curtilage which would be intermittently visible from Higher Road to the east, Lower Road to the south and nearby public rights of way would also detract from the rural setting of the appeal site. Whilst I recognise that the area to the south of the proposed terrace is indicated as agricultural land and wildlife pool, its close physical association with the proposed dwelling is such that it would appear as a suburban garden within the rural landscape. The overall effect of the development would consequently have much more urbanising effect on the rural setting of the appeal site in relative terms. As a result, the proposal would harm the character of the countryside in this location.
13. I have carefully considered the appellants' attempts to take into account the scale and form of the existing buildings on site and to replicate the appearance of a farmstead in the new dwelling. However, this does not outweigh the harm that I have found to the character and appearance of the AONB and the rural setting of the appeal site overall.
14. I therefore conclude that the proposal would have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area and would not conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB. It would conflict with the policies DMG1, DMG2, DMH3 and DMH5 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy 2014 (Core Strategy), which amongst other things, require development in the open countryside to be in keeping with the character of the landscape, where possible accommodated through the re-use of buildings and without the increase in residential curtilage outside of identified settlements. There would also be conflict with the AONB requirements of paragraph 176 of the Framework.

Loss of a Non-Designated Heritage Asset

15. The Council considers the buildings to be an NDHA and, whilst it does not hold a Local List, it is included in the Lancashire Historic Environment Record register. The buildings are described as a cluster of domestic and agricultural buildings of varying age and size, central to which is an adjoined house and barn range with elements that may date from the later 18th to early 19th century. A Heritage Statement confirms this.
16. Paragraph 203 of the Framework requires that the effect on the significance of a non-designated asset should be taken into account when determining an application affecting that asset and that a balanced judgment will be required, having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the asset. The available evidence suggests that the buildings are of some historic interest worthy of recording.
17. The proposal would result in the removal of modern ancillary structures and a static caravan on the site which do not contribute positively to the significance of the NDHA. The farmhouse, however, is of traditional vernacular style and adjoins a barn to the east. A separate 'L' shaped barn to the east is also of a vernacular style. Both parties acknowledge that the group of buildings have been altered, extended and modified incrementally.
18. The proposal would result in the complete loss of a non-designated heritage asset, and as such it would conflict with Policy DME4 of the Core Strategy, which seeks to resist proposals involving the alteration (which would reasonably include demolition), of buildings of local heritage interest which

would harm their significance. As a result of their loss, the proposal would inevitably cause considerable harm to the significance of the asset, notwithstanding that a record could be made.

19. The buildings are currently vacant, and the farmhouse is in a poor state of repair internally. I have not been presented with any compelling evidence however, other than an asbestos report, that the buildings are not structurally sound. From my observations on site, they did not appear to be in particularly poor condition, and thus incapable of conversion, at least in part.
20. Notwithstanding the above, I have considered the appellants' fallback position of a prior approval for the demolition of the buildings. I consider this to be a realistic fallback position in respect of the loss of the buildings on site. The prior approval, however, would not result in planning permission for the development sought by the appeal before me and it does not follow that a planning permission for a replacement dwelling on the site is an automatic certainty. I have therefore only attributed limited weight to the fallback position as I find that it is unlikely that the appellants would seek to demolish the buildings in the absence of the grant of planning permission for replacement development.
21. I therefore conclude that the proposal would result in the loss of an NDHA which would be harmful to its significance in conflict with Core Strategy Key Statement EN5 and Policies DMG1 and DME4 which seek to protect heritage assets in the borough, and paragraph 203 of the Framework.

Other Matters

22. I note that no objection was made by the Town Council. This does not, however, alter or outweigh my conclusions on the main issues.
23. The appellant claims that the conversion of the existing buildings would not be practical due to the presence of asbestos in the fabric of the buildings. An asbestos survey has been submitted to demonstrate the extent of its presence for the purposes of demolition of the building. Whilst the survey recommends removal of asbestos from the buildings, it does not provide conclusive evidence that the buildings could not be reused. Furthermore, it has not been objectively demonstrated that the conversion of the buildings is not otherwise practical or economically viable.

Conclusion

24. For the reasons set out above, having had regard to the development plan as a whole and all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

K L Robbie

INSPECTOR