



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 April 2023

by David Reed BSc DipTP DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 31 May 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/22/3310177

Barn at Numphra Common, St Just, Cornwall TR19 7RP

- 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 Payne against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA22/06614, dated 19 July 2022, was refused by notice dated 7 October 2022.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of a barn to a single dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposal would constitute an acceptable conversion of a rural building having regard to its construction and the effect on the character and appearance of the area, part of the West Penwith section of the Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

3. The proposal is for the conversion of a single storey former agricultural building in a rural location at Numphra Common to a small two-bedroom dwelling. The appeal site lies about 1.5 km southeast of the town of St Just, well outside the physical boundaries of the built-up area, and thus in the open countryside for planning policy purposes. In such areas Policy 7 of the Cornwall Local Plan 2016 (the CLP) limits new housing to certain limited categories, one of which is the 'reuse of suitably constructed redundant, disused or historic buildings that are considered appropriate to retain and would lead to an enhancement to the immediate setting'. The interpretation of this policy is at the heart of this case. There is no dispute that the building is at least ten years old and was built lawfully, the basic requirements for the policy to be applicable.
4. The policy sets an essentially subjective test which needs to be applied building by building and location by location. Importantly, the policy applies across the whole of Cornwall with its wide variety of landscapes, some designated as in this case as AONB, and others not. Within an AONB the additional tests of CLP Policies 3(4) and 23 apply, that the development conserves and enhances the landscape character and natural beauty of the area and is appropriately located to address the AONB's sensitivity and capacity as informed by the AONB Management Plan.

5. In this case the building is of single skin concrete blockwork, externally rendered with a corrugated iron duo-pitched roof and double metal doors at each end. The structural report states that the building is generally sound with any conversion requiring the repair of localised cracking, strengthening of the roof structure and the provision of rainwater goods and drainage. It is said to be 'adequate for the proposed conversion to habitable use'. However, the building is currently utilitarian in appearance, not inappropriate for agricultural use in a rural area, but of no particular merit and certainly not a vernacular building contributing to the character of the AONB landscape.
6. Indeed, the building requires significant redesign and remodelling to convert it to residential use. To achieve adequate internal head room the proposals include raising the eaves height from 1.95 m to 2.10 m and the ridge height from 3.00 m to 3.15 m, the building would also be extended on one side to provide a lobby and bathroom increasing its internal floorspace from 55 sq m to 64 sq m. Whilst only a modest extension, the building would also be refaced with vertical timber cladding, reroofed with black corrugated cement fibre sheets and several new window and door openings created. Overall, the extent of the proposed changes demonstrate that the building is not appropriate to retain without considerable alteration. Whilst the dwelling would be based on the structure of the existing building, it would appear very different.
7. Most decisively in this case, the proposal would result in a marked change to the character and appearance of the area. The building is located adjacent to a hedge on one side of an overgrown paddock to the north-east of Higher Numphra, a small hamlet of two cottages set in the distinctive West Penwith coastal plateau landscape of small, hedged fields interspersed with open commons and scattered farmsteads with extensive, distant views towards the coast. The proposal would establish a new residential curtilage within this rural setting, bounded by a post and rail fence delineating a site that includes parts of two fields, rather arbitrarily straddling the hedgerow. The building extension would also breach the hedgerow, with the scheme also including a hard surfaced parking and turning area and making up the lengthy grass access track across the field to a suitable standard for regular use.
8. The effect would be the unduly intrusive introduction of a residential dwelling and its surrounding garden with long access driveway, parked cars and other domestic features into the existing unspoilt, remote, rural landscape. Unlike Higher Numphra, which is relatively discreet set in a slight valley amongst trees¹, the new dwelling would be set apart on rising ground, visible from the nearby road and unavoidably from the public footpath which passes only 15 m or so away. The change from the existing agricultural field gate onto the road to a residential access drive would inevitably be harmful to the rural character of the lane and at night the dwelling would introduce light from windows where at present there is darkness.
9. The appellant draws attention to a similar utilitarian redundant barn granted planning permission for conversion to a dwelling on appeal at Little Park Farm, St Clement, near Truro². However, as the Inspector noted, the building in that case was well related to the farm, with which it shared a domestic access, there were a number of other dwellings in the vicinity, and the site 'read as being in a residential situation'. The same circumstances do not apply in this

¹ The four dwellings at Lower Numphra, lower down the valley, are even more unobtrusive in the landscape.

² APP/D0840/W/21/3279222

case. In another case, a former stable building four miles away at Sennen which was granted planning permission for conversion³ was situated close to a group of ten dwellings and similarly not comparable to the appeal building.

Conclusion

10. For these reasons the proposal would not constitute an acceptable conversion of a rural building having regard to its construction and would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area, part of the West Penwith section of the Cornwall AONB. It would conflict with CLP Policies 7, 3(4) and 23 as it would not be appropriate to retain the building for residential use, the scheme would not enhance the immediate setting of the building and establishing a new dwelling within a residential curtilage would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area/AONB.
11. The proposal also conflicts with Policies PD-P1, PD-P2, PD-P11 and PD-P18 of the Cornwall AONB Management Plan 2022-27 which require development to be landscape led, to take account of the cumulative effects of individual developments on the designated landscape, to enhance and feel part of the existing landscape, and only support the conversion of redundant agricultural buildings which are characteristic, historic, vernacular buildings worthy of retention in their own right.
12. Finally, the proposal conflicts with paragraphs 80(c) and 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework which require the re-use of a redundant building to enhance its immediate setting and give great weight to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs.
13. Whilst the proposal would reuse an existing building, provide an additional small dwelling which would benefit a local couple, help meet Cornwall's housing needs and have social and economic benefits for the St Just area, these material considerations are outweighed by the significant harm that has been identified and the resulting conflict with the development plan. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

David Reed

INSPECTOR

³ PA19/04885