



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 August 2023

by O Marigold BSc DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 August 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/23/3314177

Barn South of Pax Huic Domini, Kehelland, Camborne TR14 OBS

- 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 R Letcher against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA22/04042, dated 27 April 2022, was refused by notice dated 24 August 2022.
 - The development proposed is conversion of existing barn to form dwellinghouse and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have used the description of the proposal as set out in the Council's Decision Notice, which is more accurate than that used in the planning application form. I am satisfied that no parties would be prejudiced by my using this description.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the building is suitable for conversion to residential use, having regard to the extent of works required, its location and the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The site consists of a stable block with a pitched roof located in attractive, largely undeveloped countryside. It can be accessed from the nearest road only by crossing a field. The proposal seeks to change the use of the building to provide a single dwelling, together with an associated garden area. It also includes the creation of a new access drive, as well as a parking and turning area close to the building.
5. Policies 2 and 3 of the Cornwall Local Plan (CLP), adopted November 2016, set out the Council's spatial strategy. They seek to maintain the dispersed pattern of development in Cornwall, with the provision of homes based on the role and function of each place. The policies confirm that development will be focused on settlements with a range of facilities, to ensure that it occurs in the most sustainable locations.
6. The site is located in countryside with the nearest settlements being Kehelland and Camborne. However, these can only be accessed by narrow country roads that do not have footways or street lighting. They would therefore not be a suitable means of travel particularly at night, in inclement weather, or for those

with limited mobility. I do not have details of any bus services nearby that would provide an alternative means of access.

7. As a result, future occupiers of the proposal would be heavily reliant on private vehicles for many day-to-day facilities and services, as would visitors and deliveries. This would cause environmental harm because the proposal would not contribute to a cumulative reduction in harmful greenhouse gas emissions, or to an improvement in air quality and public health. As such, the proposal would not comply with CLP policies 2 and 3.
8. Nevertheless, CLP Policy 7 permits housing in the open countryside in certain circumstances. Relevant to this appeal, these are where the proposal involves the re-use of a suitably constructed redundant or disused building that is appropriate for retention and would lead to an enhancement to its immediate setting. There is no dispute that the building has an existing lawful use and is over ten years old, which are also requirements of the policy.
9. The appellant has provided a Structural Survey, undertaken by a qualified engineer. Some parts of the building were not inspected, but the Survey confirms that the external walls are in good condition, with no signs of significant movement. It also states that the building has foundations that appear to be performing adequately, on natural ground known to have good bearing resistance. It concludes that the building 'should' be suitable for conversion with only limited maintenance and no significant rebuilding.
10. The Structural Survey refers to the possibility of replacement timber roof members and a new timber lining that can be designed to support the additional loads. There is also reference in the appellant's submissions to a replacement roof and new external cladding. However, although proposed as a conversion, I have few details of the specific method by which this would be undertaken. The plans before me simply show much thicker external walls, the introduction of glazing and the removal of an internal bay wall, together with a Cornish granite and zinc roof finish.
11. There is little to specify what steps would be taken to undertake the works; the extent of necessary re-building, or whether the internal lining suggested by the Structural Engineer forms part of the proposal. As such, I cannot be satisfied that the proposal and its method of construction would constitute the re-use of a building without requiring substantial demolition or rebuilding.
12. The building was originally provided for the keeping of horses. The appellant states that it has not been used as such for a significant period, citing the costs of cleaning and maintenance; the need to advertise for rental occupiers and extensive periods of non-use. He also says that the rental obtained was minimal.
13. Even so, photographs within the Structural Survey, dated mid-2021, show equestrian items at the site and refer to its 'current use'. The Ecology Survey has a similar, fairly recent date and states that the stables are currently in use to house horses. These are described by the appellant as left over items. However, on my visit, I saw that equestrian jumps and tape remained within the adjacent field and that bagged feed for horses was stored on site. As such, it is difficult for me to conclude that the building is redundant or no longer used for equestrian purposes.

14. The site is within a small scale, rolling and pastoral landscape, as described by the Landscape Character Assessment in the former County Council's Landscape Character Study, June 2008. The appeal building currently has a functional design, because of its small proportions and shallow pitched roof, but appears discrete in the landscape. The proposal would involve installation of local stone to the external walls, sympathetic fenestration detailing, and a zinc roof finish. These are intended to improve its appearance.
15. However, the utilitarian form and proportions of the building would remain after completion of the proposal. The external materials and its glazing would give the building a domestic appearance. In addition, the small size of the building and its proposed division from the surrounding fields mean that it would be unusually solitary and divorced from its context, thus appearing incongruous and out of place.
16. A degree of change and domestication is inherent in the support of CLP Policy 7 for the conversion of farm buildings to dwellings. Nevertheless, the proposal would involve the creation of a long, wide driveway across the field to the building. The proposal, including the driveway and parking and garden areas, together with their use, would have a harmful domesticating and urbanising effect on the pastoral landscape. This would be particularly the case at night when the building would be lit. Even if views of the proposal from the road would be transient, the driveway would make the building and its residential use much more prominent.
17. As such, the proposal would effectively extend the built environment into the countryside, undermining its attractive, rural appearance. It would not therefore result in an enhancement to its immediate setting but would instead detract from it. For the above reasons, I conclude that the building is not suitable for conversion to residential use, having regard to the extent of works required, its location and the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.
18. Accordingly, the proposal would conflict with CLP policies 2, 3 and 7. The proposal would also conflict with the same aims of the National Planning Policy Framework, including at Paragraph 80. For similar reasons, the proposal would not meet the requirements of CLP policies 12 and 23 that the proposal has a design that responds to its landscape setting and to local distinctiveness. Due to the conflict with CLP policies that I have identified, it follows that the presumption in favour of development contained in CLP Policy 1 does not apply and so is neutral in the planning balance.

Other Matters

19. The proposal would contribute to the supply of housing. Its occupiers would make a positive social and economic contribution, as would its construction economically. The proposal would also make efficient use of an existing building. However, being for only a single dwelling, these benefits would be small and so attract only limited weight.
20. The appellant's Design and Access Statement refers to other barn conversions that have been undertaken locally. However, I have few details of these proposals. As such, I can draw little useful comparison between these and the proposal before me.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

21. For the reasons given, I have found conflict with the Development Plan as a whole. The material considerations in this case do not indicate a decision other than in accordance with the Development Plan. This leads me to conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

O Marigold

INSPECTOR