



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 September 2023

by Hannah Ellison BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 October 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/23/3317488

Hermitage Farm, Froghall Road, Froghall, Staffordshire ST10 2HQ

- 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 Christopher Cooke against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
 - The application Ref SMD/2022/0469, dated 16 August 2022, was refused by notice dated 15 December 2022.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of a poultry unit and the erection of a holiday unit ancillary to Hermitage Farm.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including the setting of the adjacent heritage assets.

Reasons

3. This appeal concerns a disused poultry building located in a field adjacent to a cluster of buildings which collectively form the residential accommodation, including holiday lets, at Hermitage Farm.
4. The main farmhouse at Hermitage Farm and the adjacent stone barn, now converted, are grade II listed buildings. Their special interest lies in their construction and rich architectural detailing. There is a clear interrelationship between the principal farmhouse and the former working barn which results in a group value. The replacement appeal building, which would sit below the farmhouse, would clearly be within the setting of both heritage assets.
5. The appeal site falls within the Churnet Valley, an area of significant landscape, wildlife and heritage value. I observed that the area around the appeal site is predominantly characterised by gentle rolling hills which create an open, pastoral character.
6. Policy SS11 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (September 2020) (the LP) provides support for short and long stay visitor accommodation within the Churnet Valley however this is subject to them being of a scale, nature and high standard of design which conserves and enhances the heritage, landscape and biodiversity of the area.
7. I appreciate that the proposed replacement building would seek to replicate the linear form and low profile of the existing building and that it would be of a simple, contemporary design. Nonetheless, the proposal would clearly read as

a non-agricultural addition, given the fenestration detailing and general domestication of the site which would occur. The proposed planting to two sides would further formalise this part of the site.

8. Further, it would occupy a significantly detached position away from the main cluster of built form at Hermitage Farm, beyond the drystone wall which largely separates the former farmstead from the field beyond. This incongruous, disconnected presence of domestic built form would be readily apparent from public vantage points due to the open, upland setting of the site.
9. By virtue of these factors, the proposal would be a prominent and obtrusive addition which would not assimilate well into the open, rural landscape in which it sits and would fail to respect the identity of the former farmstead. Thus, it would not preserve the setting of the heritage assets.
10. Whilst I acknowledge that the appeal building is in a derelict condition, it is not out of keeping with its countryside location as it largely appears utilitarian and is a nod to the appeal sites former agricultural use. It does not therefore significantly detract from the rich landscape and heritage qualities of the locality, unlike the appeal proposal.
11. I am not convinced that the proposed materials or the ability to cover the windows with shutters are sufficient measures to negate the harm I have identified.
12. The appeal site would provide new tourism facilities in close proximity to opportunity areas, as identified in the Churnet Valley Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (March 2014), and I note the nearby footpath and public transport options available. However, compliance with Policy E4 of the LP is also subject to the proposal being of an appropriate quality, scale and character which is compatible with the local area and enhances the heritage and landscape of the area.
13. The appellant has made reference to an example at Hazelwood Hall Farm however the details before me are lacking. I nevertheless agree that a pastiche design of heritage assets may not be appropriate, however it remains that the design of the appeal proposal would result in harm as identified.
14. Taking all the above into consideration, the proposal would result in harm to the landscape and heritage values of the area. It therefore fails to accord with Policies E4, SS10, SS11, DC1 and DC2 of the LP, along with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Collectively, whilst these policies and guidance provide support for tourism development, they aim to ensure that it is sensitive to its landscape and heritage setting.

Balance and Conclusion

15. Given the scale of the proposed development, the level of harm it would cause to the setting of the heritage assets would be less than substantial. Nevertheless, paragraph 199 of the Framework is clear that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Paragraph 202 of the Framework requires this harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

16. The proposed development would provide additional, large tourist accommodation in the locality, resulting in benefits including spending on tourist attractions and day to day amenities in the local area. There would also be short term economic benefits during construction.
17. The proposed planting, whilst harmful in terms of its effect on the landscape, would present limited ecological benefits, as would any introduction of owl boxes which may be forthcoming.
18. Accordingly, there are benefits which weigh in favour of the proposal. However, the weight attributable to them in the overall balance is limited due to the small scale of the proposal. Therefore, set against the great weight afforded to the heritage asset's conservation, the benefits would not outweigh the harm that would occur.
19. The proposal conflicts with the development plan when taken as a whole and the other considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

H Ellison
INSPECTOR