



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 May 2024

by J Hills MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 June 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Q1153/W/24/3337782

Drews Barn, adjacent to Lower Chichacott Barn, Chichacott, Okehampton EX20 1RS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Stephen Brown against the decision of West Devon Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 1771/23/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as "change of use of existing barn into residential accommodation including elevation changes. Provision of drainage services."
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are (i) whether the site is a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to the provisions of local and national policy and its accessibility to services and facilities; and (ii) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location

3. The appeal site comprises an unlisted but historic cob and stone barn that is located on the periphery of a small hamlet known as Chichacott. There are a number of listed buildings nearby and consequently, there is a statutory duty under the provisions of Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the buildings or their setting. These buildings are however distinctly separated from the appeal site by distance, intervening built form and vegetation. This lack of functional association with nearby listed buildings means the appeal site would not affect their setting.
4. Nevertheless, there are a good number of properties nearby, some of which are described within their listings as forming part of an unspoilt hamlet of early farmhouses. Therefore, for the purposes of applying the Bramshill ruling, the appeal site is not isolated.
5. Policy TTV1 of the Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan 2014-2034 (JLP) sets out the settlement strategy which is to focus development on the main towns which provide a broad range of services. In smaller villages, hamlets and the countryside, development is only permitted where it would

support the principles of sustainable development set out in policies SPT1, SPT2 and TTV26 of the JLP. Together, the SPT policies, amongst other things, promote communities with a mix of services, assets and greenspace, optimizing the use of previously developed sites, thus reducing the need for greenfield development. They also support proposals that have reasonable access to a vibrant mixed-use centre, and that are well served by public transport, walking and cycling opportunities, which in this respect is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

6. Policy TTV26 of the JLP focusses on development in the countryside. It says that isolated development here will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. This includes, in part, securing the long-term future and viable use of a significant heritage asset or the re-use of redundant or disused buildings for an appropriate use. However, for the reasons set out above there is little evidence that this part of the policy is relevant.
7. The second part of the policy does however say that development proposals should, where appropriate, re-use traditional buildings that are structurally sound enough for renovation without significant enhancement or alteration.
8. In that context, it is recognised that the building is of an age and nature that will require various interventions to bring it up to a habitable standard. Indeed, in accordance with the Council's Barn Guide, it is proposed to retain the roof's A-frames as a decorative feature. To do this, support would be required by the use of an internal timber frame. The cob and masonry of the main structural envelope would be re-rendered and repaired, with possible underpinning to secure walls. The totality of these works would amount to reasonable enhancements that form part of a conversion, rather than a comprehensive re-building.
9. However, the existing lean-to extension is utilitarian in its form. It is open fronted, lightweight and evidently unsuitable for conversion. The proposed replacement extension to the cob and stone building would create a proportionally sizeable new element of building. This would amount to a significant alteration. As such, there would be conflict with Policy TTV26 of the LP.
10. The infrastructure and services associated with the new housing development nearby are acknowledged. However, the appeal site is about a mile away from the town, which is accessed via an unlit and unpaved country lane. This would not be an inviting route for pedestrians or cyclists to take on a regular basis, particularly during times of inclement weather or darkness. Additionally, walking or cycling would not be suitable or desirable for everyone. I did not see any nearby bus stops and have been provided with no substantive evidence of their regularity or location of any stop that might contribute towards sustainable travel. Additionally, whilst an electric vehicle charging point may benefit some, there would be no mechanism to ensure that other vehicles could not be used.
11. As such, future occupants would be likely to be largely dependent on private vehicles for access to services and facilities to meet their day-to-day needs, which would not maintain the vitality of the rural community. For these reasons, there would be conflict with the JLP settlement strategy.

12. Therefore, I conclude on this main issue that the site is not a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to the provisions of local and national policy and the accessibility of services and facilities. For the above reasons, the development would be in conflict with Policies SPT1, SPT2, TTV1, and TTV26 of the JLP. There would also be conflict with chapter 9 of the Framework which, amongst other things, gives priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, and so far as possible, facilitating access to public transport.

Character and appearance

13. The proposal would make use of natural slate on its roof which would be an appropriate choice of material. Alterations to the fabric of the building would be modest, though would include rearranged window and door openings. These original features make a significant contribution to the building's historic qualities. The alteration of these elements would irrevocably erode an important part of the building's design. Furthermore, the tall, asymmetric glazing would consume much of the south elevation. Consequently, its inclusion would appear stark and imposing. The upper windows in particular would bear no resemblance to typical barn openings. As such, this element would appear wholly out of place.
14. Whilst the larch cladding would be locally sourced, its use throughout the scheme would make it the primary feature of the property. Even if the material is used locally, the character of this building derives from its stone and cob appearance. In that respect, the proposed extension would conceal the side elevation of the barn. Not only would this harmfully erode much of the legibility of the barn's original features, but it would also unbalance its modest and symmetrical form. Furthermore, other fenestration detailing, and the roof overhang would be particularly domestic in appearance. For the above reasons, the proposal would not blend into the landscape.
15. The heritage benefits of securing its future conservation for an alternative viable use weigh in favour of the development. However, this would not be sufficient justification to allow a proposal that does not have proper regard to the form and detailing of this locally distinctive building.
16. Therefore, I conclude on this main issue that the proposal would harmfully affect the character and appearance of the area. As such, there would be conflict with policies DEV10, DEV20 and DEV23 of the JLP. Collectively in this respect, and amongst other things, these policies seek to promote high quality, locally distinctive architectural design, and use of materials.

Other Matters

17. It is acknowledged that the proposal would not be located on the best and most versatile land, and that biodiversity net gains would result. The well insulated property would provide ample parking, waste collection, an air source heat pump and amenity space for future occupants. Moreover, the appeal site is in a tranquil setting that would be likely to promote positive mental health and wellbeing. However, any such benefits would not sufficiently outweigh the harm I have identified in respect of the main issues above.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons above, and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the proposed development would fail to accord with the

development plan as a whole and there are no considerations individually or cumulatively that outweigh this. Therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

J Hills

INSPECTOR