



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 September 2024

by Penelope Metcalfe BA(Hons) MSc DipUP DipDBE MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 September 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/E3335/D/24/3341691

Corton Wood Farm, Sutton Montis Road, Sutton Montis, Yeovil, Somerset, BA22 7HQ

- 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 Nathan Hopkins against the decision of Somerset Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/02977/HOU.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing garage and outbuilding and replacement with proposed extensions to existing dwelling and ancillary works.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. I consider that the main issue in this case is its effect on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site comprises a detached two storey house with a detached garage and an outbuilding. Planning permission was granted for its construction in 2007 subject to conditions which included restricting its occupancy to an agricultural worker and removing permitted development rights. A S.106 agreement is in place to prevent the severance of the house from 84ha of the farmland.
4. This was in accordance with local and Government policies in place at the time which required special justification for allowing isolated new houses in the countryside. Exceptional circumstances included that a dwelling would be required to enable a full-time agricultural or other rural worker to live at their place of work. Government policy also stated that agricultural dwellings should not be unusually large in relation to the agricultural needs of the unit and suggested the use of conditions attached to any permission that removed permitted development rights.
5. The house is substantial in size and includes five bedrooms. It is located in farmland which is part of a large holding owned and farmed by the appellant. It is in an open setting sited slightly away from a sizeable complex of associated farm buildings to the east. Several new buildings were permitted on the holding in 2021 as part of a farm diversification project which included

- storage barns and holiday let units. Access is from the road to the north via a long concrete driveway.
6. Policies relevant in this case include EQ2, HG8 and HG9 of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006 – 2028) (the local plan). EQ2 relates, among other things, to the design quality of development and requires development to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the district. HG8 allows for extensions to existing dwellings in the countryside only if the scale of the extension would be of a size and design appropriate to the landscape character of the location and would not be disproportionate to the scale of the original dwelling. HG9 sets out criteria for housing for agricultural and related workers in the countryside.
 7. The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (the NPPF) aims to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and maintains the long established policy of avoiding new isolated homes in the countryside. It states that excessively large dwellings in the countryside should be resisted unless the design is of exceptional quality and the building would significantly enhance its immediate setting and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.
 8. The proposed two storey extension, together with a rear single storey extension and garage would result in a floor area of approximately double that of the existing house. There is an extant permission for a garage extension similar to that which forms part of this proposal.
 9. I consider that the size, scale, form and materials of the proposed two storey extension would be excessive in this rural setting, particularly as the existing house already has a substantial size and presence in the open countryside. I have taken account of the appellant's argument that the overall enlargement of the property and the standard of accommodation and facilities would be proportionate to the size, success and viability of the farming enterprise and that some elements of the accommodation would facilitate the management of additional workers, including seasonal workers. However, not all of the proposed facilities, for example, the cinema and gym appear to be essential to the agricultural business.
 10. I have taken account of the several examples put forward of other farm houses in Somerset and elsewhere in the country. On the basis of the information before me it is apparent that there are circumstances in which large dwellings are appropriate and supported on functional and financial grounds and, in one of the examples, on unspecified personal need. However, this is already a large house, which was permitted on the strength of financial viability and functional need at the time.
 11. Government and local planning policies remain clear on the need to limit development in the countryside, including the restriction on large dwellings. I am not persuaded that the success and size of the business enterprise is sufficient justification for allowing an extension of this size, resulting in a significantly larger dwelling which would not be consistent with policy.
 12. The existing building is constructed of stone with roofs of tile and slate in a traditional vernacular style typical of the surrounding rural area. It lies in open countryside at the foot of a range of small hills, including Parrock Hill and the Beacon, with a nearby network of public rights of way, including two long

- distance footpaths. It has an imposing appearance in the landscape because of its size, but blends in by virtue of its natural materials and traditional form, while the variations in roof levels and elevational detailing add character and interest.
13. I consider that the design of the proposed two storey extension with its use of timber cladding, extensive glazing and zinc roof would be out of keeping with the traditional vernacular of the existing house and with the general pattern of development in the surrounding countryside. Rather than create balance in the building, it would serve to unbalance it and create an element which would not be sympathetic to the character of the existing building or the surrounding landscape. It would not improve on the existing form and would appear as an alien feature which would detract from the character and appearance of the building.
 14. I saw during my visit that there is a small number of contemporary modern design buildings in the wider area. While a contemporary design can often be appropriate as an extension to an existing building, I do not consider that that is so in this case.
 15. The appellant suggests that a landscaping scheme which has already been permitted would help to screen the proposal. However, while this might be some mitigation, it is not necessarily appropriate to rely on landscaping to screen an otherwise unacceptable development. In any case, this would not overcome the objection to the proposal that its size renders it in conflict with policy.
 16. Notwithstanding the appellant's argument that the size of the business is proportionate to and supports the size of the enlarged house, I consider that this is not a justification for going against the long established principal and policy for restricting large dwellings in the open countryside. It is unclear why the appellant suggests that he would need to move out. I am not satisfied that he has demonstrated that the existing house is not large enough to accommodate an adequate number of essential workers as well as family members "in sight and sound" of livestock and machinery in order to ensure security and immediate functional needs.
 17. On balance, I accept that there is some justification for extending the house in some form in the context of the size of the business. However, I am not persuaded that there is a demonstrable need for an extension of this size. The combination of proposed extensions would be disproportionate to the scale of the original dwelling and the design and materials of the proposed two storey extension would not be appropriate to the landscape character of the location.
 18. I conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the existing house and the wider landscape and that it would be contrary to local plan policies EQ2, HG8 and HG9.
 19. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

PAG Metcalfe

INSPECTOR