



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 December 2024

by H Faulkner BSc (Hons) MSc PGCE MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 03 February 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/E3335/D/24/3342740

Guards Hill Barn, Merridge Hill, Spaxton, Somerset, TA5 1BH

- 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 Steve Franks against the decision of Somerset Council.
 - The application Ref is 45/23/00023.
 - The development proposed is described as the installation of 4 dormer windows.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development on the application form and decision notice both refer to the installation of four dormer windows. The proposed front dormers were removed from the plans during the application phase and do not appear on the drawings submitted with the appeal. Their removal is referenced in the appellant's statement. I have assessed the appeal on this basis.
3. In 2023, designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales became "National Landscapes". The appeal site falls within the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the AONB) which has become the Quantock Hills National Landscape (QHNL).
4. Section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) amended the duty on relevant authorities in respect of their interactions with the statutory purposes of National Landscapes, as set out in Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended). In so far as it relates to this appeal, the amendment now requires relevant authorities "in exercising or performing any function in relation to or so as to affect land in an AONB... to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB". As such, it is incumbent on me to evidence consideration of ways to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the QHNL.
5. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework) was published on 12 December 2024. Whilst I have had regard to the Framework in reaching my decision, I have not sought the views of the parties on its implications given the minimal changes of specific relevance to the proposal.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is the effect of the proposed dormer windows on the character and appearance of the host dwelling and the Quantock Hills National Landscape.

Reasons

7. The appeal property is a converted building which is situated down a driveway to the west of Merridge Hill. There are no other properties in close proximity and to the west is an area of woodland.
8. The building retains much of its character as a former agricultural building. It has been extended at ground floor level with the additions replicating the style and materials of the original building. The elevation fronting the driveway takes a simple symmetrical form with the door in the centre and small windows either side. The rear of the building is more detailed with three large openings which were part of the building before its conversion.
9. The proposed dormers would introduce domestic features to the building. Their siting would disrupt the simple form of the roof. The positioning of the dormer windows would not align with the openings below or be symmetrically positioned on the roof. This results in them being rather at odds with the design of the building and detracts from its character as a traditional farm building. Whilst the dormers may not be visible from the road there is a footpath running adjacent to the boundary from which the property can clearly be seen.
10. Regarding the effect on the National Landscape, Policy D19 of the Sedgemoor Local Plan requires that development in AONB will only be supported where they conserve and enhance the natural beauty or the exceptional character or quality of the landscape in these areas. The Framework directs that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty of National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.
11. The national Planning Practice Guidance requires that account is taken of the relevant Management Plan. The Quantock Hills Management Plan 2019 - 2024 specifically mentions that old locally distinctive barns and farmsteads make an important contribution to the AONB and are being lost to conversion and redevelopment. Even if other rural buildings have dormer windows, in this case, they would further alter the character of the building from its agricultural form and there would be harm, albeit fairly limited, to the AONB.
12. As a result, for the reasons above, I conclude that the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the building and would not conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the QHNL. As such, it would not comply with Policies D2 and D19 of the Sedgemoor Local Plan, the Quantock Hills Management Plan and the Framework. Those policies seek development within the AONB to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty, including the distinctive landscape character.

Other Matters

13. The proposals may improve the internal arrangements of the property, however, this benefit does not outweigh the harm caused to the appearance of the building identified above. Including harm to the QHNL which must be given great weight.
14. Improvements to safety are referenced in the appellant's statement, however, no details have been provided on what the specific safety issues are and therefore these can only be given limited weight.

15. The Quantock Hills AONB Officer stated they had 'no comments to make' on the application. This does not offer support for the scheme. I have considered the proposals against the relevant policies and reached my own conclusions in respect of the impact on the National Landscape accordingly.

Conclusion

16. The proposed development would conflict with the development plan, when read as a whole and there are no other material considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, that outweigh this finding. Therefore, for the reasons given the appeal is dismissed.

H Faulkner

INSPECTOR