



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 September 2024

by K Reeves BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 February 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/J9497/W/24/3338076

Little Coombe, Road from St Peters Church to Pixeycombe, Meavy, Devon PL20 6PJ

- 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 & Mrs Scutt against the decision of Dartmoor National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref is 0357/23.
 - The development proposed is change of use stables to office and storage and installation of solar panels.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for change of use stables to office and storage and installation of solar panels at Little Coombe, Road from St Peters Church to Pixeycombe, Meavy, Devon, PL20 6PJ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 0357/23, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area including: (a) whether the development would conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of Dartmoor National Park (DNP); and (b) whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Meavy Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

3. The site is within DNP, which is known for its open, windswept upland moors with far reaching views and a sense of remoteness and wildness with distinctive granite tors. In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in protected landscapes.
4. The CA encapsulates the village of Meavy, which is a settlement with ancient origins on the River Meavy. According to the Meavy Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2011), the significance is derived, in part, from the retained traditional buildings and spaces, the association with the River Meavy, the ancient river crossings at Meavy Ford and Meavy Bridge, and the village's historic relationship with the former orchards and meadows that form its traditional agricultural setting.
5. The Framework advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation.

6. The appeal site is located in a field near to the southern boundary of the CA. Part of the field is currently used as a garden for Little Coombe¹. The site consists of a stable building and part of an adjacent building that is referred to in the evidence as a garage. The majority of the stable building is well screened from the public realm due to mature vegetation on the boundaries of the field and the garage building. However, one of the roof slopes of the stable building is visually prominent from the car park of Meavy Parish Hall.
7. The proposal to change the use of the stable building includes the installation of windows and doors in the existing openings and rooflights in the existing roof. The open fronted lean-to would be infilled with timber cladding and a window. It is also proposed to install solar panels on the roof of the building. Most of the internal floor area would be office space with a W.C. and the lean-to would provide storage space.
8. Planning permission was granted on 27 May 1987 for the erection of the stable building². Condition (b) of that permission states that *the stables and tackroom hereby permitted shall only be used for private purposes and no trade or business whatsoever shall be carried out therefrom*. The building therefore has a private equestrian use and it would appear that no commercial uses can be carried out from within the building.
9. The majority of the proposed alterations to the external elevations of the stable building would be kept to those facing over the field and the impact on the wider landscape and CA is therefore limited. The alterations to the roof slope facing towards the parish hall would be more prominent. However, with an appropriately worded condition requiring details of the solar panels, including colour, to be approved prior to installation, that element of the proposal would also have minimal effect on the character and appearance of the area.
10. The red line area associated with the stable building is tight around that building, including the covered apron in front of the building. As such, the extent of activity associated with the proposed use of that building would be limited to the building and the covered apron and potentially harmful domestic clutter and paraphernalia could not be sited other than within the covered apron where it would have limited visual impact.
11. For the above reasons, the proposed change of use of the stable building and the associated alterations to the exterior of the building would not undermine the quality of the protected landscape or its natural beauty. Furthermore, it would preserve the character and appearance of the CA and therefore not compromise its heritage significance.
12. Given that the proposed use of the stable building would be for private office and storage space ancillary to Little Coombe, which is situated across the road from the site, and having regard to the existing private equestrian use of the building, I cannot foresee there being a material increase in vehicular movements as a result of the proposal. Bearing in mind the existing private equestrian use and the likely pedestrian movements associated with that use, I am not persuaded that the proposed use of the stable building would result in a material increase in those

¹ Dartmoor National Park Authority application reference 0672/05

² Dartmoor National Park Authority application reference F/3.43/1195/1987/1428/5

types of movements either. The proposal would therefore not detrimentally impact on the tranquillity of the area.

13. Turning to the proposed solar panels on the roof of the garage building, that element of the proposal is not mentioned in the Authority's reason for refusal. There is also no reference to those panels in the officer report. It therefore appears that the Authority does not have concerns over the installation of solar panels on the roof of the garage building. The building has a dark roof covering and the submitted plans indicate that the proposed panels' protrusion from the plane of the roof would be minor. Dark coloured panels would assimilate with the roof of the building and therefore not cause material harm to the character and appearance of the protected landscape or the significance of the CA.
14. For these reasons, the proposed development would not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area, when having particular regard to the effect on DNP and the CA. Consequently, the proposal would comply with Strategic Policies (SP) 1.1, 1.2, 2.1 and 2.7 and Policy 3.7 of the Dartmoor Local Plan 2018 – 2036 (LP), which collectively seek, in part, to conserve and enhance the character, quality, landscape, natural beauty, cultural heritage and tranquillity of the National Park. The proposal would also comply with the English National Parks and the Broads UK Government Vision and Circular 2010, insofar as it reiterates the National Park's first statutory purpose of conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and cultural heritage. The natural and historic environment policies of the Framework would also be complied with.
15. The Authority's reason for refusal refers to a conflict with SP 2.8 of the LP. The policy relates to the conversion of historic non-domestic buildings in the open countryside. Given that the stable building would have been constructed in the late 1980s or the early 1990s, I do not consider it to be historic in terms of its age and, moreover, it does not have historic interest in terms of its built fabric. As such, SP 2.8 is not determinative in the consideration of the appeal.

Other Matters

16. The appeal site is located to the south of the village centre, which includes numerous listed buildings and structures. To the north and north west of the site are Little Coombe, the Royal Oak Inn, the lych gate of the Church of St Peter, the Meavy war memorial, the village cross and a K6 telephone kiosk, which are all Grade II listed.
17. In respect of those listed buildings, I could not find an inter-visibility with the appeal site, and the site is not located close to those designated heritage assets. Furthermore, the garage building represents a considerable intervening structure between the listed buildings and the stables. Mature vegetation, including trees, is a screening feature between the appeal site and the listed buildings. There is also a notable change in the ground level between the stables and the heritage assets. As such, I am not persuaded by an interested party's submission that the site is in the setting of the listed buildings and the proposal therefore has no material impact on each individual listed buildings' respective significance.
18. I note the comments made by the Authority's heritage specialist in relation to the Grade II* listed Meavy Barton. However, that is a different site that is located a considerable distance from the appeal site and the comments therefore do not

relate to the proposal before me. Furthermore, each proposal should be judged separately on its own individual merits.

19. The interested party has also drawn my attention to details indicating that the appellants' business is registered to an address that is not Little Coombe and the party seems to suggest that the business would be moved to the appeal site. However, the proposal is for a home office and I do not have anything before me to suggest that the business' office with any employees would be relocated to the site. Furthermore, the use of the building as a commercial office would likely require further permission and therefore is not a determinative matter in the appeal.
20. I also acknowledge the comments made by the interested party in relation to the conduct of Burrator Parish Council. However, this has had limited bearing on my decision, which is focused on the planning merits.

Conditions

21. The Authority has suggested various conditions in the event that I am minded to allow the appeal. I have considered these against the six tests set out in the Framework and Planning Practice Guidance and made changes to the wording to improve precision and enforceability as appropriate.
22. The standard time limit condition and a condition listing the approved plans are necessary for the purposes of clarity. Conditions restricting the construction materials of the windows, doors and cladding to those that are appropriate to the building's location within DNP and the CA are reasonable and necessary to conserve the protected landscape and the designated heritage asset.
23. Conditions requiring the submission of details of the solar panels and external lighting are also reasonable and necessary to ensure that the proposal does not cause material harm to the character and appearance of the area and protected species, respectively. In order to conserve the protected landscape and historic environment, the removal of permitted development rights for new and replacement windows, doors, dormer windows and rooflights is reasonable and necessary.
24. Sewage disposal should be the subject of a planning condition in any approval to ensure that this matter has been appropriately detailed, and that the system is fit for purpose. In the interests of ecology, a condition ensuring appropriate enhancement of biodiversity is reasonable and necessary. In order to prevent future potentially inappropriate uses of the stable building, a condition is attached restricting the use to the purposes being applied for.
25. The site is located near to a watercourse and hedgerows, and there is the potential for bats to be using the area around the site as part of a connected network to commute through the landscape. However, the 'Wildlife, Geology or Invasive Species Trigger Table' document submitted by the appellants confirms that the proposal would not impact on watercourses, hedgerows or trees and indicates that an ecological survey would not be required in this respect. Furthermore, the potential for bats to roost, or birds to nest, in the building is limited due to the lack of openings in the walls and roof. I note that ecology was not considered in the officer report and the Authority appear to have not disputed the information in the aforementioned document. As the presence of protected species or otherwise

should be established prior to determination, and taking into account that it has not been evidenced that there would be a material impact on ecology as a result of the proposed development, a condition requiring an ecological survey to be carried out is therefore not reasonable or necessary.

26. Given that the site boundary is tightly drawn around the building, a condition removing permitted development rights for the erection of buildings and structures is also not reasonable or necessary.

Conclusion

27. For the reasons given above the appeal should be allowed.

K Reeves

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with drawing nos 2566 (S-)01 A, 2566 (PL-)01 A and 2566 (PL-)02 A.
- 3) The external windows and doors in the development hereby permitted shall only be constructed from natural timber or aluminium and shall be retained as such thereafter.
- 4) The external cladding on the development hereby permitted shall only be constructed from natural timber and shall be retained as such thereafter.
- 5) Prior to their installation on site, detailed scaled drawings (in both elevation and plan) of the solar panels, showing their exact location on the roofs and colour, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The solar panels shall be installed in accordance with the approved details and subsequently retained in accordance with the approved details.
- 6) Prior to the installation of external lighting, full details including height, design, location and intensity of that lighting shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The lighting installation shall then be carried out in accordance with the approved details and maintained as such thereafter.
- 7) The development hereby permitted shall not be used or occupied until works for the disposal of sewage have been provided on the site to serve the development hereby permitted, in accordance with details that have first been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be maintained in accordance with the approved sewage disposal details thereafter.
- 8) The development hereby permitted shall not be used or occupied until works for biodiversity enhancement have been provided on the site in accordance with a detailed Biodiversity Enhancement Plan that has first been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include a timetable for the implementation of the works. The development shall be maintained in accordance with the approved Biodiversity Enhancement Plan thereafter.
- 9) The building labelled as 'STABLES' on approved drawing no 2566 (S-)01 A shall not be used or occupied other than as an office and storage space ancillary to the residential use of the dwelling known as "Little Coombe, Meavy", and shall not be used, let, leased or otherwise disposed of for any other purpose, including ancillary living accommodation or commercial purposes.
- 10) Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (or any order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification), no new or replacement windows, doors, dormer windows or rooflights, other than those expressly authorised by this permission, shall be installed on the building labelled as 'STABLES' on approved drawing no. 2566 (S-)01 A.

End of Schedule