



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 December 2024

by Neil Pope BA (HONS) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24th February 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Q1153/W/24/3350114

Thorn Farm, Lewdown, Okehampton, Devon, EX20 4PS.

- 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 and Mrs Perkins against the decision of West Devon Borough Council (the LPA).
 - The application reference is 3233/23/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the conversion and extension of an existing barn into residential accommodation and demolition of a former agricultural building and lean-to.
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Procedural Matter

This decision is issued in accordance with Section 56(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and supersedes the decision issued on 19 December 2024.

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the conversion and extension of an existing barn into residential accommodation and demolition of a former agricultural building and lean-to at Thorn Farm, Lewdown, Okehampton, Devon, EX20 4PS. The permission is granted in accordance with the terms of the application reference 3233/23/FUL and subject to the conditions in the attached Schedule.

Main Issues

2. The two main issues are: firstly, whether the site is a suitable location for a new dwelling, having particular regard to national¹ and local² planning policies for housing within the countryside and; secondly, the effect upon the character and appearance of the area and the host building.

Reasons

First Main Issue

3. In essence, in contributing to the achievement of sustainable development, established national and local planning policies for the countryside seek to locate new housing where it would enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. This includes the re-use of redundant or disused buildings.
4. The appeal site forms part of a traditional farmstead within the countryside. It lies outside the confines of any recognisable settlement and is a considerable

¹ The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), December 2024.

² The development plan, which includes the Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan 2014-2034 (LP).

Whilst noting the provisions of the spatial and settlement policies, I consider that the most important policy to the determination of this appeal is TTV26 (development in the countryside).

distance from main services and facilities. As is commonplace within the countryside, access is via narrow, unlit rural roads. Occupiers of the proposed dwelling would be dependent upon the use of a private motor vehicle.

5. I note the LPA's concern that the proposal would not meet any of the criteria provided for within LP policy TTV26.1. In support of its argument, the LPA has drawn attention to the accompanying Supplementary Planning Document³ to the LP. Amongst other things, this advises that when considering the re-use of redundant buildings under TTV26.1(iii), an "appropriate use" is one that requires a countryside location. As no agricultural or other special (rural) need has been advanced there is merit to the LPA's case on this matter.
6. Nevertheless, TTV26.1(v) allows for development that would protect or enhance the character of historic assets and their settings. Neither the main appeal building nor the farmstead to which it belongs comprise a designated heritage asset. I note from the officer's report that the proposal would not "save a significant heritage asset or protect an historic asset". However, LP policy TTV26 does not define "a significant heritage asset" and, in responding to the appeal, the LPA acknowledges that there is a heritage asset in play.
7. The main appeal building is a 19th century vernacular barn/stable with stone walls⁴ (including lime mortar and two arrow-slit ventilators) and a pegged A-framed truss roof clad in profile sheeting (south elevation) and artificial slates (north elevation). It is now redundant from agricultural use having previously been used for animal housing with a hay/fodder loft above. This traditional building, which is largely unaltered and appears to be structurally sound⁵, is of a pleasing form and appearance and of some architectural interest as a vernacular farm building. It is also part of a small assemblage of historic buildings, including the adjacent farmhouse, that provides local character and distinctiveness to this part of the West Devon countryside⁶.
8. I note from the appellants' detailed and informative Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment (HSIA), that this traditional stone building forms part of a farmstead that has long⁷ and interesting philanthropic⁸ and agricultural associations with the parish of Marystow. Whilst the main appeal building does not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets, I agree with the appellants that it has sufficient architectural and historic importance/merit to be treated as a non-designated heritage asset. It is capable of being treated as a historic asset under LP policy TTV26.1(v).
9. The proposed development would secure the re-use of a redundant building and historic asset. In so doing, it would help to maintain the vitality of the local rural community and accord with the broad thrust of national and local planning policies for housing within the countryside. It would not undermine the LP spatial strategy or settlement policies⁹.

³ SPD dated 2020.

⁴ There is a small 20th century blockwork extension at the eastern end.

⁵ I note the contents of the letter/report dated 7 December 2022, from the appellants' consulting engineer.

⁶ Amongst other things, the LPA's 'Traditional Farm Buildings Their Adaptation and Re-Use (Barn Guide)' recognises the important role that traditional historic structures have on the character of the local landscape.

⁷ Part of the farmstead dates back to at least the 16th century.

⁸ The farmstead included charitable housing for unmarried mothers, the poor, widows and elderly of the parish.

⁹ Whilst I have determined this appeal on its own merits, I note from the appellants Statement that the LPA permitted a barn conversion in location that is not dissimilar to the appeal site and on the basis of compliance with LP policy TTV26 (ref. 1412/23/FUL).

Second Main Issue

10. As already noted, LP policy TTV26.1(v) requires development to protect or enhance the character of historic assets and their settings. Under LP policy TTV26.2(ii) proposals for the re-use of traditional buildings should, where appropriate, not involve any significant enhancement or alteration. The LPA's Barn Guide recognises the importance of conserving traditional farm buildings and advises that conversion schemes that involve new extensions or additions are more likely to harm the integrity of a farm building and are less likely to be acceptable. Under TTV26.2(vi) proposals should, where appropriate, also enhance the immediate setting of the site.
11. The proposed conversion of the traditional stone appeal building would preserve the original size and pattern of door and window openings on the northern elevation and retain the arrow-slit ventilators on the gable ends. Where necessary, the stone walls would be sympathetically repaired using matching natural materials and natural slates would be used on the roof.
12. The number of new openings¹⁰ would be limited. These would comprise a small ground floor window and doorway in the southern elevation and four small conservation style rooflights. Whilst the loss of original fabric for a new doorway would be unfortunate, overall, the physical works of adaptation to the existing building would protect its character.
13. The proposal also includes removing the existing blockwork extension on the eastern end of this traditional stone barn. This would enhance the character of the building and its contribution to the local rural scene. A very modest sized lean-to with matching stone walls and slate roof would be built on the western end. Access into the new lean-to would be via an existing doorway. This extension would not harm the character or appearance of the building.
14. The proposed sun room on the rear (southern elevation) would also be finished with matching stone and slate. It would extend along about half the length of the existing building and would include a row of windows with some rooflights above. This addition would appear as an overtly domestic and somewhat ill-fitting addition to this vernacular building. I agree with the findings within the appellants HSIA that this extension, by virtue of its design, size and fenestration, would have a minor adverse impact upon the character of this traditional stone barn/stable.
15. In the context of LP policy TTV26.2(ii) the proposals would secure the re-use of a traditional building without significant enhancement or alteration. Whilst the proposed sun room would be a minor detracting element of the southern elevation of the main appeal building, the proposals also include the removal of a rather unsightly former milking parlour immediately adjacent to the roadside. This would enhance the immediate setting of the main appeal building, which is an historic/heritage asset and the local rural scene.
16. In addition, a sizeable expanse of hard surfacing within the site would be removed to allow for the creation of a wildflower meadow and wildlife area to the south of the main appeal building. These works would further enhance the setting of the main appeal building. A planning condition limiting the extent of the residential curtilage could be attached to a permission to ensure that

¹⁰ A mixture of timber joinery and UPVC is proposed. Whilst UPVC would detract from the integrity of the building, this could be controlled/avoided by way of a suitably worded planning condition.

domestic paraphernalia did not visually intrude into the rural surrounds. The small solar array proposed on the west facing roof slope of a former cowshed would provide energy from a renewable resource without harming the character of the main (traditional) appeal building or the rural surrounds.

17. When considered overall, the proposed development would preserve the character and appearance of the area and the host building. The proposals accord with LP policy TTV26 and the objective of the LPA's Barn Guide.

Other Matters

18. I note the LPA's concern that insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate adequate drainage provision. However, there is ample space within the site in which to locate the proposed package treatment plant and there would be a significant decrease¹¹ in the extent of impermeable areas arising from the development. There is nothing before me to suggest that the site is at undue risk of flooding or to demonstrate there would be pollution problems. A planning condition attached to an approval would secure adequate drainage arrangements. There is no conflict with LP policy DEV35.
19. The proposal would increase the stock of housing within this part of West Devon and would provide some support for the construction industry. There would also be additional Council Tax receipts. The proposed wildflower meadow, wildlife area and barn owl box recommended in the appellants ecology report, would all help to increase biodiversity. These benefits add some limited weight to the argument for granting planning permission.

Conditions

20. In addition to the 'standard' start date, for the avoidance of doubt, a condition would be necessary specifying the approved plans. To safeguard the integrity of the main appeal building, conditions would be necessary regarding the use of natural slates, matching natural stone (and lime mortar), timber framed windows, conservation style rooflights and metal rainwater goods. For the same reason a condition removing permitted development rights for extensions and alterations to the building would also be necessary.
21. To ensure the development delivers all of the proposed benefits, conditions would be necessary requiring the removal of the milking parlour, as well as providing the proposed wildlife and wildflower meadow (including reduction in impermeable areas), barn owl box/roost and renewable energy generation¹². A condition restricting external lighting would be necessary to safeguard the character and appearance of the area. As already noted, a condition would also be necessary to secure adequate drainage arrangements. To avoid disturbing nesting birds a condition would be necessary requiring the development to proceed in accordance with the recommendations contained within the appellants ecologist's report.

¹¹ On behalf of the appellants, it has been calculated that the impermeable areas would reduce from 1,419m² to 562m².

¹² The LPA's suggested condition requiring details of compliance with the objectives of LP policy DEV32 is excessive and unreasonable. Elsewhere, I have modified some of the LPA's other suggested conditions to reflect the advice in paragraph 57 of the Framework.

Conclusion

22. Given all of the above and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should succeed.

Neil Pope

Inspector

SCHEDULE OF PLANNING 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 the following approved drawings: 1:1,250 scale site location plan ref. 22-033-05; 1:50 and 1:500 scale proposed elevations and layout plan ref. 22-033-04 A; 1:50 and 1:500 scale roof plans plan ref. 22-033-06; 1:500 scale block plans showing approved impermeable areas plan ref. 22-033-07.
3. As recommended within the Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment dated July 2024, the development shall be finished using natural slates on the roof of the dwellinghouse hereby approved, including the use of verge slates on the extensions. Samples of the slates shall have previously been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Repairs to the external walls of the dwelling shall be undertaken using matching natural stone and a matching lime mortar mix.
4. All window frames and doors shall be of timber construction and the rooflights shall be of the 'conservation style', flush fitting with the roof slates.
5. All rainwater goods shall be of metal construction, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
6. The dwelling hereby approved shall not be occupied until details of the foul and surface water drainage from the site have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The dwelling shall be occupied in accordance with the approved drainage details, which shall be retained thereafter.
7. The dwelling shall not be occupied until the 8kW solar pv array has been installed on the roof of the existing cow shed, as shown on the approved plans, and is capable of generating electricity from a renewable resource.
8. Prior to the occupation of the dwelling hereby approved, details of the landscaping and planting arrangements for the proposed garden, wildflower meadow and wildlife area/orchard, as shown on the approved plans, including a programme of implementation, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The dwelling shall be occupied in accordance with the approved details.
9. The dwelling shall not be occupied until details of a barn owl box or the

provision of a permanent barn owl roosting/nesting site, as recommended in the Bat and Barn Owl Assessment dated March 2021, including a timetable for provision, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The dwelling shall be occupied in accordance with the approved details.

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) the dwelling hereby permitted shall not be extended or enlarged (other than the alterations detailed on the approved plans in condition 2 above), including any alteration to the roof, without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority.
11. The dwelling shall not be occupied until the milking parlour, shown to be demolished on the approved plans, has been removed from the site and details of the roadside boundary treatment have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The dwelling shall be occupied in accordance with the approved details.
12. No external lighting shall be erected or installed without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority and the rooflights shall include low transmittance glass as recommended in the Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment dated July 2024.
13. The extent of the residential curtilage to the dwelling hereby permitted shall be limited to the areas shown in a light green colour and labelled 'Garden' on the approved 1:500 scale block plan and the areas shown coloured pink on the approved 1:500 scale block plan as Impermeable Areas Upon Completion.
14. Building works and vegetation clearance shall be undertaken in accordance with the recommendations contained within paragraph 6.2 of the CEC ecology report dated March 2021.