



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 September 2025

by F Webber BSc (Hons), MSc, MRTPI, ACSM

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/J9497/W/25/3360811

Moorland Retreat, Bonnaford, Brentor, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0LX

- 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 Field against the decision of Dartmoor National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref is 0452/24.
 - The development proposed is a change of use from C2 residential institution to C3 dwelling house.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. There were three red line plans submitted with the application. Plan ref 01 Site Plan, includes the access to Moorland Retreat, the related gardens and ancillary buildings, an area of hardstanding behind and the surrounding agricultural land and sheds. The appellant has made reference to all of these in the Planning Statement and Design and Access Statement submitted with the application. It is also noted that this red line encompasses another dwelling (Stablelights Cottage) currently in residential occupation.
3. The two remaining red line plans ref A.599.01.5 'Block Plan of Proposed' and ref A.599.01.6 'Block Plan of Existing' relate to the principal building within the appeal site and excludes some of the structures in plan ref 01. For avoidance of doubt as to the extent of the proposed change of use I have determined the appeal in respect of the plan ref 01 accordingly.
4. There have been a number of addresses stated in both the application, decision and appeal documentation in respect of the appeal site, I have taken the address to be that used in the decision notice of the Authority and reiterated in the Statement of Case of the appellant.

Main Issues

5. The main issues in this appeal are as follows:
 - whether there is a continued need for a residential institution (Use Class C2) in this location; and
 - whether the proposed change of use class to C3 would make efficient use of land to deliver an appropriate housing mix in this location.

Reasons

Need

6. The appeal site is a former farmhouse, known as Bonnaford Farm originally built circa the 18th Century and located to the edge of Brentor village, in the Dartmoor National Park. The dwelling subject of this appeal had been granted a change of use to hotel and restaurant in the early 1980's and again to a residential respite care home, for children and young adults, in 1986. The care home, latterly operated by a charity, received clients from anywhere in the UK. The charity also used the premises for their office space. The charity ceased to use the site for respite care in 2017. The stated reason for this was due to the increased costs and the need for investment to maintain the building. The administrative staff relocated to offices elsewhere in 2019. The building remained vacant and was sold in 2022 and has been unoccupied since.
7. Whilst information has been submitted illustrating the reasons for the closure of the charity run respite care home, little evidence such as an independent assessment, has been provided to demonstrate that a C2 use would no longer be viable. The appellant has also not demonstrated that other potential uses for the site could be an option. The Authority has highlighted the importance of protecting community facilities and services and would support appropriate new business or non-residential use where it would complement the existing use.
8. The appellant contends that there is no statutory requirement to market the property, which is correct. Whilst there is no policy or legislative requirement that marketing the property is essential in considering that the loss of a use is acceptable, in policy terms, it is one means by which the demand and viability of such uses can be tested and evidenced. I therefore consider that little evidence has been provided, over and above assertion and speculation, that a use within the existing use class or an alternative use that would retain a community use is not viable.
9. Consequently, in the absence of sufficient evidence identifying that there is only one option available, being to return the building back to a large open market dwelling, I conclude that the proposed development would conflict with the Strategic Policies (SP) 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 4.1 and 5.1 of the Dartmoor Local Plan 2018-2036 (DLP), which seek to deliver the National Park purpose and protect Dartmoor's Special Qualities through proposals pursuing sustainable development; maintain existing community facilities; restrict development in Brentor; and to permit complementary employment opportunities.

Housing mix

10. In returning the building back to its original C3 use the appellant seeks only to provide for one open market dwelling. It is noted that no substantive internal or external changes to the fabric and layout of the building are being proposed, and the dwelling would provide a total of 7 bedrooms.
11. The Authority indicated that the site does not fall within the settlement boundary and is in open countryside but does consider that it is in walking distance of Brentor, bus stop and village hall and that the use of the site for affordable housing may be acceptable. The Planning Practice Guidance paragraph: 014 Reference ID: 2a-014-20241212 states that National Parks can identify a housing need figure using a method determined locally. The Principal Housing Enabler has identified a shortfall in affordable housing in the parish, specifying the type of properties needed for local families. The most recent Housing Needs Survey was carried out

in 2022 and whilst the population has not increased, the number of occupants per household has reduced. Hence the Authority has identified the need for one or two bed properties.

12. The appellant has referred to paragraph 80 c) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) however, for clarity I believe the relevant paragraph to be 84 c). The Appellant contends that the proposal would re-use redundant or disused buildings in the countryside and that this exception has precedence over local policy. However, the Authority has not rejected the possibility of a return to C3 use but rather that where C3 use is sought, support may be given to the sub-division of the principal building to create smaller units, which would align with paragraph 84 d) of the Framework. In respect of sub-division, the appellant has not provided evidence that this was considered as an option.
13. During my site visit I noted that the access to the site was generous and there was sufficient hardstanding to allow the parking and manoeuvring of several vehicles off the highway. In addition, given the extent of the footprint of the existing dwelling, land and ancillary buildings within the site, there could be potential for sub-division or redevelopment. This would introduce a mix of dwellings potentially including affordable and open market, whilst preserving the original character of the farmhouse. Whilst paragraph 84 c) is a material consideration it is also considered alongside all other relevant considerations including those of the Framework and the Policies in the adopted development plan when considered as a whole. Based on the current evidence, I therefore conclude that the proposal would be contrary to Policies SP 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.5 of the DLP that seeks development that makes efficient use of Dartmoor's land supply; contributes towards creating and sustaining a sustainable and balanced community by delivering a mix of dwellings of types that will meet the needs of present and future generations.

Other matters

14. The appellant has stated that the property is at risk, referring to the Framework. Given the options laid out by the Authority regarding the potential future uses of the site, little evidence that alternative uses have been adequately explored since the building became vacant. Consequently, the condition of the building and responsibility for maintaining falls to the appellant.
15. It is noted that the appellant considers that the Authority has misinterpreted the meaning of s55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. It is not clear how this has been the case and, in any event, it is not possible in an appeal considering a refusal of a planning application to formally determine whether planning permission is needed in respect of the proposed change of use.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons given above the appeal is dismissed.

F Webber

INSPECTOR