The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 October 2018

by Kevin Savage BA MPlan MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13th November 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/18/3204906
The Stables, Woodhouse Green Farm, Rushton Spencer SK11 0RS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Mr Callum McConnachie (Arkhi Architects) against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
- The application Ref SMD/2017/0481, dated 13 July 2017, was refused by notice dated 19 December 2017.
- The development proposed is to change existing agricultural stables building to a private domestic residence.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The address given on the application form was '3 Woodhouse Green Farm'. However, the appeal form and the appellant's statement of case uses 'The Stables', which better identifies the appeal site relative to other adjacent properties bearing variations of the Woodhouse Green Farm name. I have therefore used this name in the banner heading.

3. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 24 July 2018 and replaces the first Framework published in March 2012. This change to national guidance is a material consideration and the main parties have had an opportunity to comment on it. References hereafter in the decision are to the new Framework.

Background and Main Issue

4. The appeal relates to a stable building. Planning permission for its conversion to a dwelling, with associated extension and external alterations, was refused by the Council in December 2017, leading to the present appeal. Three reasons were set out in the Council's decision notice. In summary, these stated that 1) the existing building was not appropriate, suitable or worthy of conversion, 2) the proposal would result in an isolated dwelling in the countryside, and 3) the proposed design of the building would be visually intrusive.

5. The site lies within an area of Green Belt, however there is consensus between the main parties that the proposal would not amount to inappropriate development, being that it would comprise the re-use of a building that is of permanent and substantial construction, and include an extension that would not amount to a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building. The proposal would accord with the provisions of Paragraph

146 of the Framework in this respect. This being the case, it is not necessary to consider whether there would be very special circumstances.

6. Following the aforementioned refusal, the Council granted permission[1] for an alternative scheme submitted by the appellant in respect of the same site. This decision represents a fall-back position. The Council acknowledges that this decision establishes the principle of the conversion of the stables to a dwelling, and the acceptability of the site's location relative to local services. Therefore, I consider that there is no longer a dispute in respect of the first and second reasons for refusal, and I shall confine my analysis to the third reason for refusal.

7. Therefore, the **main issue** in this case is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the building and surrounding rural landscape.

Reasons

8. The appeal site is located in a rural area, to the rear of Woodhouse Green Farm, with which it was formerly associated. The site comprises vacant stables built in blockwork with external metal cladding to the upper parts of the walls and the roof. Adjacent to these buildings and joined by a high level canopy, but not part of the appeal site, is a two storey, stone built, former agricultural building with permission for conversion to ancillary residential use in association with 2 Woodhouse Green Farm.

9. The proposal would involve the removal of the canopy, and construction of an extension projecting from the corner of the building on the inner side of the site, away from the road. This extension would be built in sandstone with a glazed link to the existing building. The proposal would otherwise retain the existing blockwork and black painted metal cladding, which would be extended in some areas. New windows would be inserted in the elevations. In addition, various features are proposed to encourage integration of the built and natural environments, including new hedgerows, water habitats to two sides, an insect wall, newt hibernaculum and overhangs for nesting birds. A projecting walkway is proposed which would lead from the building over one of the water features to a hard landscaped platform with steps to the garden.

10. Given the appellant's fall-back position, I have had regard to the approved scheme, which omits the proposed extension, glazed link and external walkway, and features fewer, smaller window openings.

11. Policy DC1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Development Plan Document (March 2014) (the CS) states that new development should be of a high quality and add value to the local area. Proposals should be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance. Policy DC3 states that the Council will protect and where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements.

12. The existing building is evidently agricultural in character, given its shape and use of simple, functional materials. Whilst described as utilitarian, the building is not out of character with its rural setting. The re-use of the existing materials in the proposed scheme would ensure that its agricultural character is maintained. The proposed external walkway, raised platform and stairs would

[1] Council Ref: SMD/2018/0165

be located within the confines of the site behind boundary hedgerows. Given their position close to ground level, and the lower level of the road, views of these features would be relatively limited to glimpses through the hedgerow. Given this, I find that these elements would not be harmful to the overall character or appearance of the building or surrounding landscape.

13. The proposed windows to the elevation facing the garden would be larger than those of the approved scheme, but would have consistency to their height and form, and would respect the utilitarian character of the existing building. The elevation facing the road would appear much as existing, except for the addition of an external staircase. Such a feature is not uncommon to agricultural buildings, and would not appear incongruous in this context. Several of the proposed ecological features would be located to the inner side of the building, out of public view and facing an expanse of open fields. In this position, they would have minimal effect on the overall appearance of the building, and they would not adversely affect the surrounding landscape.

14. The principal difference with the approved scheme is the proposed sandstone extension and glazed link. The use of stone would reference surrounding buildings at Woodhouse Green Farm, but would contrast significantly with the existing materials used on the appeal site. Although positioned to the interior of the site, the extension would project significantly in front of the existing building, forming a prominent addition. This prominence would be increased by the proposed pitched roof, which would be taller than, and differ in form from, the shallow monopitch of the existing stables.

15. Given its position, and the stark differences between the existing and proposed elements in terms of materials and form, the extension would appear as an exposed and incompatible addition to the building. The glazed link would serve to further detach the extension from the existing building and increase its conspicuousness. The resulting building neither would neither wholly retain the existing utilitarian aesthetic, nor would it replace it with a more traditional appearance of a stone built farm building. Instead, it would be a mix of two styles which would result in a jarring and uncomfortable building. It would draw undue attention in views from the road and from neighbouring properties. The overall building would appear incompatible within its surroundings and would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape.

16. I acknowledge the various design elements incorporated into the scheme to promote biodiversity, which are commendable. I further acknowledge the creative approach taken to the design, which is encouraged by Policy DC1 and the Framework. However, for the reasons given, the proposal would fail to respect the character and appearance of the building and surrounding rural landscape, and would be contrary to the requirements of Policies DC1 and DC3. There would also be conflict with Policies R1 (Rural Diversification) and R2 (Rural Housing) of the CS, which both require that development, including extensions, should not harm the rural character and environmental quality of the area. Furthermore, the proposal would conflict with the Framework which identifies good design as a key aspect of sustainable development.

Planning Balance

17. The Council accepts that it cannot demonstrate a deliverable five year supply of housing sites, confirming in its committee report that the supply stands at 1.99

years. Given this, policies for the supply of housing are not considered to be up-to-date, and paragraph 11 of the Framework is therefore engaged.

18. There would be economic benefits from construction, and subsequently through use of local services by prospective residents, albeit these would be very limited given the small scale of the development.

19. The proposal would provide various ecological features designed to enhance biodiversity within the site, including protected species. Such measures are encouraged by paragraph 175 of the Framework. Taking into account the small scale of the proposal, I accord these benefits moderate weight overall.

20. The proposal would not amount to inappropriate development in Green Belt and no other harm has been identified in Green Belt terms or with respect to the effect on neighbours' living conditions or highway safety. However, the absence of harm in these respects is a neutral factor that neither weighs for nor against the proposal.

21. However, I have found that there would be harm to the character and appearance of the building and wider landscape, resulting in conflict with the development plan and the Framework. To this conflict, I give significant weight.

22. In reaching this view, I find that there is a material difference between the appeal scheme and approved fall-back scheme, the latter being a scaled-back version omitting, amongst other elements, the proposed extension. This being the case, the fall-back scheme would not justify an appeal proposal wherein the specific harm identified relates to a principal element of difference between the schemes and which has been found on its own merits to a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the local rural landscape.

23. Despite the extent of the housing supply shortfall, I am satisfied that the harm identified would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits associated with the provision of a single dwelling. Consequently, the proposal would not result in sustainable development when considered against the development plan and the Framework as a whole.

24. The Framework does not change the statutory status of the development plan in terms of decision making. I conclude that the identified harm arising from the proposal results in conflict with the development plan that is not outweighed by the other material considerations in this case.

Conclusion

25. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Kevin Savage

INSPECTOR