The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 April 2022

by David Jones BSc (Hons) MPlan MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 May 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/21/3282079
Land to the east of Ross Road, Whiston, Staffordshire

- 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 C. Maddock against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
- The application Ref SMD/2020/0212, dated 22 April 2020, was refused by notice dated 17 August 2021.
- The development proposed is a new vehicular access and removal of access approved under application SMD/2016/0806 which is to be reinstated to agricultural land.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The planning application form gives the address of the appeal site as Heath House Farm, Ross Road, Whiston, ST10 2JF. The Council's decision notice refers to Land to the east of Ross Road, Whiston, Staffordshire. I have adopted this address as it more accurately describes the appeal site as it is shown on the submitted location plan.

3. At the time of my visit, I saw that the development had commenced with the four piers and the cobbled drive entrance constructed, and work on the drystone wall connecting the pillars in its infancy. The proposed drystone wall running along the western boundary of the site and the timber gate indicated on the submitted plans were absent, with work on raising the existing stone wall to the south of the access also not having yet commenced. I have dealt with the appeal on that basis.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on:

   - the character and appearance of the area; and
   - the setting of nearby listed buildings.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. The appeal site is located within the rural area to the south of the village of Whiston and is situated on the eastern side of Ross Road, which slopes downwards towards the south. A track leading to Heath House Farm runs along

the southern boundary of the site, whilst to the west and south-west on the opposite side of Ross Road are a number of large portal framed agricultural buildings associated with Eavesford Farm. Eavesford Farmhouse itself and a separate barn are both Grade II listed buildings.

6. The appeal site forms part of a larger plot of land which is subject of an extant planning permission (Ref: SMD/2020/0261) for the reconstruction of the former Whiston Eaves Stable Block for use as a dwelling and holiday let. The stable block has yet to be constructed, however the 'parking barn' also approved under the same permission is substantially complete. An existing vehicular access to the site approved under a separate planning permission (Ref: SMD/2016/0806) is situated further north along Ross Road.

7. The appeal proposal would see the removal of the existing vehicular access with the land being reinstated and a hedgerow planted along the site's frontage with Ross Road. The proposal also includes the formation of a new vehicular access in the south-west corner of the site adjacent to the existing track to Heath House Farm, along with the construction of 4 no piers and timber gate with a 1.8-metre-high drystone wall running between them, flanking the access on either side and running northwards adjacent to the highway along the western boundary of the site. To the south of the new access an existing wall would be raised in height to 1.65 metres.

8. While there are examples of walls, fences and gates in the area, I observed that boundary treatments and vehicular accesses predominately comprise of hedgerows, low drystone walls and traditional agricultural metal gates, which contribute to a verdant rural character. Within this context, due to its height, length and grandiose design, the proposed piers, gate and walls would appear as an intrusive and dominant addition to the street scene which would harm the character and appearance of the area.

9. Although the proposed planting of a hedgerow in front of the section of wall running to the north of the new vehicular access would provide a degree of screening, due to its height and scale and the surrounding topography, the proposed development would still be visually intrusive when approaching along Ross Road from the north. Furthermore, there would remain unobstructed views of the development immediately outside the appeal site and when approaching from the south as no screening is proposed along the south-west corner of the site.

10. The appellant states that the 4 no piers are constructed in stone that will match that to be used in the reconstruction of the Whiston Eaves Stable Block on the appeal site, and that they were reclaimed from the stable block's former location. No evidence has been provided however which would demonstrate that the piers were linked to Whiston Eaves Stable Block or that it previously had a grand and imposing vehicular access in its original location.

11. In any event, although grand in size and scale, the proposed reconstructed stable block will retain an agricultural form and appearance. Whilst the materials used in their construction would be similar to those commonly found in the area, when taken together the 4 no piers, drystone walls and solid timber gate would not represent a traditional form of access and boundary treatment at agricultural buildings or stables within the upland rural area. As such, the proposed development would not be in keeping with the character

and appearance of the proposed reconstructed Whiston Eaves Stable Block and would appear an incongruous feature within the wider rural setting.

12. I therefore conclude that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. There would be conflict with Policy DC1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (adopted September 2020) (LP) which seeks, amongst other things, to ensure that developments respect the site and its surroundings and promote a sense of place and identity through its scale, height, siting, landscaping and character and appearance.

Setting of Listed Buildings

13. Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires me, in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest.

14. Two Grade II listed buildings are located approximately 75 metres from the appeal site at Eavesford Farm. These buildings comprise the farmhouse itself and a barn and form part of a courtyard arrangement. However, views of the listed buildings from the appeal site are blocked due to the presence of a number of large portal framed agricultural buildings and a two storey brick and blockwork barn which abuts the highway.

15. Consequently, given the distance and the lack of inter-visibility between the sites, I do not consider that the proposed development would have any impact upon the listed buildings or their settings.

16. For these reasons I conclude that the proposed development would preserve the setting of the nearby listed buildings and would not detract from their significance. It would therefore accord with Policy DC2 of the LP which seeks, amongst other things, to ensure that developments conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets and their setting.

Conclusion

17. I have identified that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. Whilst the development would be acceptable in terms of its effect on the setting of nearby listed buildings and not result in any further harm being caused, this is of neutral effect when weighed in the planning balance.

18. The proposal would conflict with the development plan and there are no material considerations which would outweigh this finding. For the reasons given above the appeal is dismissed.

David Jones

INSPECTOR