
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 January 2015

by Gary Deane BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 11 February 2015

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/A/14/2228213

Woodfield Farm, Longsight Road, Clayton le Dale, Blackburn BB2 7JA

- 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 John Wade against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 3/2013/0442, dated 2 May 2013, was refused by notice dated 15 July 2014.
 - The development proposed is the change of use of approved garage, store and office accommodation to reinstate original dwelling.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matter

2. On 16 December 2014, the Council adopted its Core Strategy (CS). The CS supercedes the Ribble Valley District Wide Local Plan Review and the Proposed Main Modifications to the CS, to which the Council refers in the decision notice. The adopted CS is now afforded the full weight of the development plan and must be considered consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Both main parties declined to submit further representations in the light of the new planning policy regime having been given the opportunity to do so.

Main issues

3. The main issues are how the proposal sits with regard to planning policies that govern the location of new housing in the countryside and the effect of the proposal on the local economy.

Reasons

4. The proposal is primarily to convert that part of a detached 2-storey building containing office accommodation to a dwelling at Woodfield Farm, which forms part of a small group of buildings next to Longsight Road (A59) in the countryside. The site would be subdivided between the new dwelling and the adjacent detached house with the proposal served by a separate access from the A59. Other parts of the appeal building would remain unchanged.
-

5. The appeal building was previously a dwelling with planning permission given for its conversion to provide garaging and office accommodation in 2006. A condition was imposed at that time to restrict the occupation of the offices only to businesses connected with occupiers of the adjacent house. A legal agreement completed at the same time echoed this restriction.

Planning policies that govern the location of new housing in the countryside

6. The Framework states that planning should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and support thriving communities within it. It also states that planning should contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. CS Policies DMG1, DMG2 and DMG3 similarly aim to safeguard landscape character, existing amenities and the natural environment. To achieve these objectives, these policies broadly seek to direct new development towards existing settlements with the approach outside of these areas being one of development restraint. CS Policy DMG2 requires new development to be in accordance with this strategy and to support the spatial vision. It sets out the categories of development that would be acceptable outside defined settlements, none of which would apply in this case.
7. The Framework advises that local planning authorities should avoid allowing new isolated homes in the countryside, unless there are special circumstances. While not isolated in that the appeal building does not stand alone in the landscape, it belongs to a group of buildings that are situated well away from the nearest settlement. In that context, it occupies an isolated location.
8. Examples of special circumstances are given in paragraph 55 of the Framework, which include where the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and lead to an enhancement to the immediate setting. In this instance, it is unclear from the evidence whether the appeal building is genuinely redundant or disused because it is variously described as both currently in use and vacant. No significant external alterations to the building are proposed apart from the removal of the existing signage. Only relatively minor changes are intended to the space around the appeal building, including new fencing to demarcate the curtilage of the new dwelling. Even taking into account the removal of commercial traffic associated with the permitted use of the property, I am not convinced that these measures would noticeably enhance the immediate setting of the site. To my mind, the new development does not meet any of the special circumstances set out within the Framework.
9. With regard to accessibility, there are some limited services available within the nearest recognised settlements of Osbaldeston and Copster Green. These settlements are some distance from the site and themselves are away from larger centres of population such as Preston and Clitheroe where a greater range of services and facilities are found. Buses run along the A59 past the site providing connections to larger towns. However, from the timetables provided, these services are infrequent and walking or cycling the considerable distance from the site to the nearest bus stop could not reasonably be described as convenient as the appellant suggests.
10. For all of these reasons, I consider that most trips to shops, schools, places of employment, health, leisure and other services from the new dwelling would be heavily reliant on the private car. This arrangement is at odds with a core

principle of the Framework to manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling. As such, I am unable to conclude that the proposal is suitably located, which is a requirement of CS Policy DH3. This policy sets out the circumstances in which the conversion of buildings to dwellings would be acceptable in the countryside.

11. Given the modest changes proposed to the site, it is unlikely that the proposal would generate significant economic benefits during the construction phase. As part of the social dimension of sustainability, the proposal would add to the local housing stock and would thus help meet the needs of present and future generations. With regard to the environmental considerations, the proposal would make efficient use of the site, re-use an existing building and it could be expected to be energy efficient. There would be no harmful visual impact on the landscape character of the area. Nevertheless, to achieve sustainable development, the Framework advocates that gains in the economic, social and environmental dimensions should be sought jointly and simultaneously. In this case, the site is not in a sustainable location and the proposal run counter to the development strategy that underpins the recently adopted CS.
12. Drawing all of these strands together, I conclude on the first main issue that the proposed development sits uncomfortably with planning policies that govern the new housing in the countryside. That is because it conflicts with CS Policies DMG1, DMG2, DMG3 and DMH3, and the Framework.

Effect on the local economy

13. Key Statement EC1 of the CS states that proposals which result in the loss of an existing employment site to other forms of development, as would be the case here, will need to demonstrate that there will be no adverse impact on the local economy. CS Policy DMB1 also notes that the conversion of sites with employment generating potential for alternative uses will be assessed against various criteria, which includes the attempts made to secure another employment generating use.
14. The appellant's evidence, which is supported by a letter from Dewhurst Homes, refers to the unsuccessful marketing efforts to sell the property, which includes the existing house and the appeal premises combined, over an extended period. That the occupation of the appeal offices is tied to businesses operated by occupiers of the adjacent house would dampen demand from prospective purchasers is accepted. I also acknowledge that the loss of office accommodation in this instance would be relatively modest in scale.
15. However, while the appellant's evidence reports that the market is subdued for a property at the price offered, few details are before me to explain exactly to whom the property has been marketed and whether flexibility has been shown in relation to the terms on which it has been offered. While factors such as the presence of the busy A59 nearby and the size of the property may deter some prospective occupiers, other people and businesses may not be affected by these considerations. There is no detailed analysis of the local economy before me to assess what impact the proposal would have on the supply and demand for accommodation of the sought available at this location. Moreover, there is no compelling evidence before me of an identified need for housing in this case to outweigh the economic and other reasons to safeguard the employment use.

16. Overall, I find that the appellant has not met the requirements of CS Key Statement EC1 and Policy DMB1 because there is insufficient evidence to show that the release of the appeal property for non-employment use would not have an adverse impact on the local economy. For this reason, I am unable to conclude that there would be no detrimental effect on the rural economy, to which CS Policy DMH4 refers. This policy sets out the conditions in which the conversion of barns and buildings to dwellings would be permitted.

Other matters

17. The Council is concerned that the proposal, if permitted, would set an undesirable precedent in that similar proposals elsewhere in the countryside might be more difficult to resist. While I accept the Council's general concern in this respect, no particular sites have been drawn to my attention that could be candidates for small scale housing in countryside locations or an explanation of the ways in which these would exacerbate an unsustainable pattern of development. In the absence of this evidence, and given that each case should be assessed on its own merits, as I have done in this instance, this matter does not weigh against the appeal.
18. The appellant considers that the Council is unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites as required by the Framework. The Council contests this finding. It considers that there is a 5.1 years supply of housing land and so the fourth bullet point in paragraph 14 of the Framework would not be engaged. Even though the appeal scheme would make modest contribution to housing provision, the harm that I have identified significantly and demonstrably outweighs this benefit.
19. Reference is made to recent decisions to grant planning permission for the conversion to residential use of buildings elsewhere in the countryside, notably at Langho, Sawley and Knowle Green. In my experience, it is rare that direct parallels can be drawn between sites given that local circumstances often vary. From the limited information provided, there are significant differences in terms of location, proposals and characteristics between the sites quoted and the proposal such that preclude any valid comparisons between them. Therefore, these cases do not weigh in support of the appellant's case.

Conclusion

20. Overall, for the reasons set out above and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Gary Deane

INSPECTOR