



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 May 2012

by **Richard Clegg BA(Hons) DMS MRTPI**

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

Decision date: 28 June 2012

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/A/12/2170475

4 Root Hill Estate Yard, Whitewell Road, Dunsop Bridge, Clitheroe, BB7 3AY

- 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 S Waller against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 3/2011/0620, dated 2 August 2011, was refused by notice dated 29 September 2011.
 - The development proposed is described as '18 PV panels on the south facing roof above the existing roof, inverter and wiring on the inside of the building'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. On the application form, the location refers simply to Root Hill Estate Yard. It is clear from the representations that the premises to which the appeal relates are No 4, and I have identified them accordingly in the appeal details above.
3. The proposed development is more clearly described as the installation of 18 photovoltaic panels on the south-east roof plane, and I have considered the appeal on this basis.
4. After the appeal had been submitted, the *National Planning Policy Framework* (the Framework) was published and came into effect on 27 March 2012. The main parties were given the opportunity to comment on the Framework in respect of their cases.

Main Issues

5. I consider that the main issues in this appeal are:
 - (i) The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
 - (ii) Whether any harm arising from the proposal would be outweighed by other considerations.

Reasons

Character and appearance

6. Root Hill Estate Yard comprises a group of traditional rural buildings outside Dunsop Bridge. No 4 is on the southern side of the group, and this building has been converted to office use. The estate yard is within the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty AONB, and lies in an attractive lowland setting with moorland fells rising above the valley floor. Policy ENV1 of the Ribble Valley Districtwide Local Plan makes it clear that the landscape and character of the AONB is to be protected, conserved and enhanced, and the Framework explains that AONBs are amongst those areas which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.
7. No 4 Root Hill Estate Yard has retained the appearance of a traditional rural building following conversion, with an uncomplicated form and, apart from a small flue, an unbroken south-east roof plane. The panels would be installed in a single array on this roof plane, and would be slightly above the line of the existing slates. They would extend across more than half the width of the roof, and break its continuity, although the single array would reflect the simple lines of the building, and the dark colour of the cells would lessen the contrast with the slates. In addition, the panels would be treated with an anti-reflective coating
8. The group of buildings at Root Hill Estate Yard is clearly seen across the intervening field from Whitewell Road. Whilst the change in the appearance of the roof would be apparent on the approach towards the site from Langden Bridge, the position of the panels just above the existing roof slope would not be a distinguishing feature from this direction, given that views would be towards the roof plane and that the building is set back from the road. This aspect of the installation may be noticed from the access drive, which carries a concessionary footpath towards the side of the buildings, but as the array would be set in from the edge of the roof, the side view of the panels would not be prominent.
9. The relatively wide array of panels would detract to an extent from the character of the traditional building, and it would thereby impinge on the quality of the surrounding landscape. The appellant points out that the building has been reroofed, and that the slates have not been laid in diminishing courses as was traditionally the practice. Nevertheless the materials and continuity of the existing roof plane are typical of a traditional rural building, in contrast to the addition of the array of photovoltaic panels. I consider that the proposal would fail to contribute to the conservation of the natural beauty of the area. This is a requirement of Policy ENV1, and the justification to Policy ENV25 of the Local Plan, which is concerned with assessing renewable energy schemes, similarly states that proposals within the AONB will have to contribute to the protection, conservation and enhancement of the landscape. The use of corrugated metal and cement fibre sheeting on the roofs of some farm buildings in the AONB is unattractive, but it does not justify an erosion of the quality of the building at No 4 Root Hill Estate Yard. I conclude that the proposed development would detract from the character and

appearance of this part of the AONB, and that in this respect it would conflict with Policies G1, ENV1, ENV 24 and ENV25 of the Local Plan, and with the objective of paragraph 115 of the Framework.

Other considerations

10. One of the core principles of the Framework is to support the transition to a low carbon future, and to encourage the reuse of existing resources and the use of renewable resources. It is anticipated that the installation of photovoltaic panels would halve the amount of energy imported from the National Grid by the AONB office, which occupies the building, thereby contributing towards reductions sought in carbon emissions in line with this principle. Policy ENV24 of the Local Plan supports renewable energy schemes, where they would not cause unacceptable harm in the local environment, and the Forest of Bowland AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement advocates that small-scale photovoltaic installations on commercial buildings, where there would be minor landscape and visual impacts, should not normally be the subject of objection. The proposal would be consistent with an objective of the AONB Management Plan to promote the AONB as a place of best practice in responding to climate change, and another objective is to facilitate appropriate small-scale renewable energy production.
11. The AONB office explains that the proposal would result in cost savings and that it would also be promoted as an example of good practice to encourage micro-generation. The contribution to renewable energy generation and reduction in carbon emissions, and the cost saving to the occupier provide certain support for the appeal proposal. However, the support for renewable energy schemes in the Local Plan, and in the AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement, is qualified by their effect on their surroundings. In this regard, Policies ENV24 and ENV25 of the Local Plan carry most weight, since they are part of the Development Plan and consistent with the importance accorded to conserving the landscape of AONBs in the Framework. The justification to Policy ENV25 makes it clear that proposals within the AONB must contribute to the protection, conservation and enhancement of the landscape. I consider that the test of appropriateness in the AONB Management Plan should also be assessed in this way. Consequently, and given the extent of the array in this open position, I conclude that other considerations do not outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of this part of the AONB which would result from the proposal.

Conclusions

12. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Richard Clegg

INSPECTOR