



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 June 2011

by John Wilde C.Eng M.I.C.E.

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

Decision date: 22 June 2011

Appeal Ref: APP/R3325/A/11/2144772

Breach Furlong Barn, Breach Furlong Lane, High Ham, Langport, Somerset, TA10 9BB

- 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 the estate of Mrs M E B Thyer deceased against the decision of South Somerset District Council.
 - The application Ref 10/02933/FUL, dated 12 July 2010, was refused by notice dated 6 September 2010.
 - The development proposed is the change of use and conversion of agricultural barn for use as single unit of holiday accommodation.
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Application for costs

1. An application for costs was made by the estate of Mrs M E B Thyer deceased against South Somerset District Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Decision

2. I dismiss the appeal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area and the existing barn.

Reasons

Character and appearance of the area

4. The appeal site is a narrow field containing a small barn towards its western end. The field has hedges and trees to its north, east and west boundaries, with a ditch and more recently planted hedgerow to the south boundary. The nearest buildings to the site are a stables to the south and a private dwelling to the west.
5. I have been supplied with a Landscape statement (LS) produced by Swan Paul Partnership dated November 2010. The LP concludes that the proposed development would not cause any significant impact, unacceptable harm or detriment to the landscape, with the overall impact being minor adverse or neutral. In arriving at this conclusion however, the LS describes the land surrounding the appeal site as semi-domestic.

6. To the north of the appeal site, beyond the boundary, there are fields variously described by the appellant as either paddocks or private amenity land. These fields serve as a buffer between the appeal barn and the dwellings that front the lane to the north. To the south to the side of the stables the land is given over to an equestrian and an allotment area beyond which are open fields, within which a few trees have been relatively recently planted. The appellant once again describes the fields to the south as private amenity land, and points to the presence of a stepladder and trampoline in the land surrounding the site as evidence of this.
7. I accept that the appeal site and its surroundings do not exhibit the open character of the Somerset levels or moors. The fields however, while not given over to pure agriculture, are more akin to rural pasture land than pure domestic lawns. To my mind, notwithstanding the presence of the previously mentioned artefacts, the area surrounding the appeal site has the appearance and character of a semi-rural landscape rather than a semi-domestic one. The presence of the unspoilt appeal site adds to this overall impression.
8. The proposed development would result in the introduction of holiday accommodation into this semi-rural landscape. I note the appellant's contention that a holiday let would be different in character from a permanent domestic residence in that it would have less domestic clutter. Nonetheless, a holiday let would have associated parking and would be very likely to attract outdoor domestic clutter such as washing lines and patio furniture, even if only for short periods, as holiday makers would be inclined to make use of the outdoor portion of the development. Whilst suitable conditions could prevent some outdoor clutter, they would be difficult to enforce, and the small size of the proposed accommodation would make the occurrence of such outdoor clutter more likely.
9. Furthermore, the dwelling would be reached by a long driveway stretching from Breach Furlong Lane to the east of the site. This access arrangement would differ from much of the other residential properties in the vicinity, and would be necessary because the barn is disconnected from the nearest available road, which is to the west of the site. I accept that there are other properties that derive their access from Breach Furlong Lane, but these properties are situated close to or at the end of the lane. While I note that the driveway would only consist of two parallel strips of compacted stone for a good proportion of its length, this would nonetheless be readily noticeable within the context of the semi-rural environment. I accept that it is possible that a similar form of driveway could be created for agricultural use. However, such a proposal is not before me, and I have had no indication that such an eventuality is likely.
10. The presence of the driveway, car parking area, parked cars and likely domestic trappings would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, which I have already identified as being semi-rural. Furthermore, the access arrangement and setting of the proposed holiday unit would be out of keeping with most of the other habitable buildings in the area. These factors would place the proposed development in conflict with policies ST6 and EC3 of the South Somerset Local Plan (LP). The former of these seeks to ensure, amongst other things, that development preserves and complements the key characteristics of the location, to maintain its local distinctiveness. The latter seeks to ensure, amongst other things, that development respects or enhances the characteristic pattern and features of the surrounding landscape.

11. In arriving at this conclusion I am conscious of the landscaping proposed to the boundaries of and within the appeal site. Whilst this would with time mitigate the appearance of the proposed development, it would not prevent the change in landscape character that would be an outcome of the development. I also note that tourism has a beneficial impact on the local economy. This does not however, outweigh my above findings.

Character and appearance of the existing barn

12. The existing barn is constructed of stone under a tiled roof. It has two small windows and a door in the south elevation and a window high up in the west elevation. The east and north elevation are blank, and overall the barn has an agricultural appearance. The proposed conversion would involve the enlargement of the windows in the south elevation and the insertion of three new windows, two in the east elevation and one in the west elevation.
13. This would result in the barn having a more domestic appearance which would be out of keeping with its setting. This would place the proposed development in conflict with policy EH6 of the LP. This policy makes clear that the change of use of buildings will be permitted provided that the bulk, form, scale and general design of the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings.

Conclusion

14. In light of my above findings, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

John Wilde

Inspector