

8. FULL APPLICATION – CHANGE OF USE OF EXISTING DAIRY MILKING PARLOUR TO FORM BUNK HOUSE ACCOMMODATION WITH FACILITIES AND MEETING ROOM SPACE AT BLAZE FARM, BUXTON ROAD, WILDBOARCLOUGH (NP/SM/0319/0308, ALN)

APPLICANT: MR M W WALLER

Summary

1. The application is for the conversion of a modern portal framed agricultural shed which is of no historic or vernacular merit to holiday accommodation. This is contrary to Core Strategy policy RT2 which seeks to restrict proposals for self-catering accommodation to traditional building or historic or vernacular merit and DMH9 in relation to farm diversification. The application is recommended for refusal.

Site and surroundings

2. Blaze Farm is located in open countryside between Wincle and Wildboarclough, on the northern side of the A54. It is a working mixed beef and sheep farm and it also provides a range of ancillary visitor development including tea rooms, pottery studio, holiday accommodation and animal petting.
3. To the north-east of the farmhouse and traditional former barn there is range of three portal framed agricultural sheds. The current proposals relate to part of the southernmost of the three sheds. The part of the shed in question was until recently used as a milking parlour and for calf housing.

Proposal

4. Planning permission is sought for the alteration and conversion of the former milking parlour/calf shed to form 'bunkhouse' holiday accommodation. The accommodation would be spread over two floors with a total floor area of 432 sqm. On the ground floor would be two bunk rooms (each sleeping twelve people) plus three further bedrooms (sleeping seven) together with showers, toilets and a laundry/boot room. On the first floor would be two meeting rooms, a quiet room, a lounge and a kitchen/dining room.
5. Parking spaces would be created in an existing yard area to the north west of the building.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be REFUSED for the following reasons:

1. The proposals are for the conversion of a wholly untraditional modern portal framed farm building which has no historic or vernacular merit to holiday/bunkhouse accommodation contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, DS1 and RT2 and Development Management Policies DME2.
2. By virtue of the scale of the proposed use when taken with the existing and extant tourist uses, the tourist business would be unlikely to remain ancillary and subsidiary to the agricultural business contrary to Development Management Policy DME2.

3. **The proposals would perpetuate the presence of a building that by virtue of its massing, detailing and materials does not contribute to the character of the area and which is prominent from public vantage points contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP2 and GSP3 and Development Management Policy DMC3.**

Key Issues

- Whether the principle of the conversion of the building is acceptable under policy RT2 and the impact on the character of the area.
- Farm diversification.

History

6. February 2018 – pre-application sought including with regard to the current proposals. We advised that the conversion of the modern farm building to bunk house accommodation would be contrary to policy and could not be supported.
7. March 2019 – planning permission granted for construction of detached art and craft studio and change of use of part of traditional barn to holiday accommodation.
8. November 2003 – planning permission granted for use of farm building for ice-cream production.
9. April 2002 – planning permission granted for use of shipping as tea room, replacement calf building, creation of new parking area and new sewage treatment plant
10. December 2001 – planning permission granted for use of buildings as tearoom and toilets, creation of walkway to picnic area and creation of pond.
11. April 2000 – planning permission granted for creation of new access and closure of existing access.
12. September 1996 – planning permission granted for change of use from shippon/barn to display area, craft units and cafeteria.
13. March 1996 – planning permission granted for erection of sheep building.
14. April 1993 – planning permission granted for erection of cubicle shed.
15. April 1993 – planning permission granted for erection of silage building.

Consultations

16. Highway Authority – no response to date.
17. Parish Meeting – support the application. The proposals will provide local employment and attract and boost tourism bringing visitors and trade to other businesses in the area. There is shortage of bunkhouse accommodation in the locality. The changes to the building will improve the ecological and environmental standard of the current structure.
18. Authority's Tree Conservation Officer – no objections subject to conditions. The proposed development will require the removal of a mature ash tree. The ash tree is situated in a highly visible position as part of a row of trees along a field boundary.

However, the tree is not in a good condition and would require significant remedial works or removal in the near future.

19. Right of Way Officer – the development does not appear to affect a public right of way.

Representations

20. A total of 21 letter of support have been received from local people, business owners and leaders of groups many of whom visit the farm at present. In summary they raise the following points:

- Hill farms are facing challenging conditions and rural diversification schemes are key to their survival.
- The development would provide welcome additional accommodation and would boost tourism in the wider area.
- The accommodation would be well used by local groups including D of E, Motorbike Groups, agriculture students/children with Special Education Needs and more.
- The farm already has an established footfall of visitors to the café/farm/lambing and craft facilities.
- It would provide overnight access to a wider demographic population.
- The building is within an established setting of traditional farm buildings.
- The proposals would benefit other business in the area.

21. Two letters of objection have been received which raise the following points:

- There is already bunkhouse accommodation locally that would be adversely affected by the proposals.
- Impact on the heritage of the farm by domination by holiday lets.

Main policies

22. Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, DS1, L1, E2 and RT2

23. Relevant Development Management policies: DMC3, DME2 and DMT6

National planning policy framework

24. National Park designation is the highest level of landscape designation in the UK. The Environment Act 1995 sets out two statutory purposes for national parks in England and Wales which are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of national parks by the public. When National Parks carry out these purposes they also have the duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Parks.

25. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been revised (2019). This replaces the previous document (2012) with immediate effect. The Government's intention is that the document should be considered as a material consideration and carry particular weight where a development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date. In particular Paragraph 172 states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.

26. In the National Park the development plan comprises the Authority's Core Strategy 2011 and the Adopted Development Management Policies. Policies in the Development Plan provide a clear starting point consistent with the National Park's statutory purposes for the determination of this application. It is considered that in this case there is no significant conflict between prevailing policies in the Development Plan and more recent Government guidance in the NPPF with regard to the issues that are raised.
27. Development plan
28. Core Strategy policies GSP1, GSP2 and GSP3 together say that all development in the National Park must be consistent with the National Park's legal purposes and duty and that the Sandford Principle will be applied where there is conflict. Opportunities for enhancing the valued characteristics of the National Park will be identified and acted upon and development which would enhance the valued characteristics of the National Park will be permitted. Particular attention will be paid to impact on the character and setting of buildings, siting, landscaping and building materials, design in accordance with the Design Guide and the impact upon living conditions of local communities. Core Strategy policy GSP4 highlights that the National Park Authority will consider using planning conditions or obligations to secure the achievement of its spatial outcomes.
29. Core Strategy policy RT2 allows for the provision of self-catering accommodation provided that the change of use involves a traditional building of historic or vernacular merit and provided the proposals would not create unacceptable landscape impact in open countryside.
30. Core Strategy policy L1 states that development must conserve and enhance valued landscape character, as identified in the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan and other valued characteristics.
31. Core Strategy policy E2 states the proposal for business development in the countryside outside the Natural Zone and named settlements should be located in existing traditional buildings of historic or vernacular merit on farmsteads and in groups of buildings in sustainable locations. However where no suitable traditional building exists, the reuse of modern buildings may be acceptable provided that there is no scope for further enhancement through a more appropriate replacement building. On farmsteads small scale business development will be permitted provided that it supports an existing agricultural or other primary business responsible for estate or land management.
32. Development Management Policy DMC3 provides detailed criteria to assess design and landscaping.
33. Policy DME2 (Farm Diversification) states that development will be permitted if there is clear evidence that the new business use will remain ancillary to the agricultural operation of the farm business, meaning that the new business use is a subsidiary or secondary use or operation associated with the agricultural unit. It further states that new buildings may be permitted if the proposed development cannot be appropriately located in existing buildings of cultural heritage significance or in other buildings which remain appropriate within the farm building group.

Assessment

Whether the principle of the conversion of the building is acceptable and the impact on the character of the area.

34. A statement submitted by the applicant explains that he ceased dairy farming in March

2018 for a number of reasons including low milk prices and rising costs. As a result, the large milking parlour is now redundant. The farm started to diversify 17 years ago and now operates an ice cream parlour, tea room and pottery studio. Planning permission was also granted in 2018 for the conversion of part of the traditional barn to a 3-bed holiday unit and for the erection of a new build arts and craft studio. This consent has been implemented and the craft studio is under construction. A submitted agricultural appraisal explains that although milk production has ceased, Blaze Farm is still a working farm with 200 acres of land owned and rented, and a stock of 330 breeding ewes and 19 store beef cattle (to be increased to 40-50 head).

35. The applicant now wishes to expand the tourist based enterprise further by providing accommodation for groups including school groups, Duke of Edinburgh (D of E), veterinary and agricultural student groups, and for groups using the recently approved craft studio.
36. The Authority recognises that accommodation for staying visitors can contribute to the local economy and enable visitors to enjoy the National Park. Consequently, Adopted Core Strategy policy RT2 allows for the provision of new self-catering accommodation through the conversion of traditional buildings of vernacular merit, and this has the benefit of enhancement through the preservation of those buildings of merit. It was on this basis that planning permission was granted for the conversion of part of the traditional shippoon to a holiday cottage in 2018. A number of additional appropriate farm diversification projects have already been supported by the Authority.
37. However, in this case the subject building is a modern portal framed agricultural shed, which appears to have been constructed in the 1980s. It is constructed in a mixture of concrete blocks and grey corrugated sheeting. It is a very large building measuring 6.1m wide by 36.8m long with an eaves height of approximately 4.1m to the eaves and 5.6m to the ridge. It is fairly well screened from the A54 by an adjacent cattle housing building but its tall gable end is visible from the south and its north west elevation is visible from the minor road to the north west in the winter months
38. Large portal framed farm buildings are permitted in the National Park as an exception to normal design standards because it is accepted that they are necessary in order to facilitate the agricultural management of the landscape. However, because of their wholly untraditional massing, materials and detailing their re-use for holiday accommodation is inappropriate and wholly contrary to policy RT2. Policy RT2 only supports the conversion of traditional buildings that are of historic or vernacular merit to holiday accommodation. There are many modern buildings like this one scattered throughout the landscape of the Park and if the Authority adopted a practice of allowing them to be converted to living accommodation then the quality of the built environment of the National Park would be severely degraded. In fact Core Strategy policy GSP2 makes it clear that opportunities should be taken to enhance the National Park by the treatment or removal of undesirable features or buildings. The supporting text of policy RT2 also sets out that conversions and changes of use of existing traditional buildings of historic or vernacular merit will provide ample opportunities for small scale holiday developments. If modern buildings were allowed to be converted to holiday use it is likely that there would be less incentive to convert historic buildings and the heritage benefits of giving historic buildings new uses would be lost.
39. Recent changes to permitted development rights allow the conversion of modern agricultural buildings such as this to other uses including residential and business uses. However, in adopting these changes the government specifically excluded National Parks in recognition to the harm that would be caused to the special qualities of the nations best and most important landscapes if buildings such as these were converted for other uses.

40. It is acknowledged that the applicant is not proposing to use the accommodation for standard 'holiday' purposes (but intends that it would be more directed towards groups of educational and environmental users). This is possibly more akin to a 'youth hostel' type use which is classed as 'sui generis'. As such it could be argued that the proposals represent 'business development' and thus merit consideration under Core Strategy policy E2. This policy does state that on farmsteads the re-use of modern buildings for business uses may be acceptable, however policy DME2 (Farm Diversification) in the newly adopted Development Management Plan gives more detailed guidance by stating that such modern buildings must '*remain appropriate within the farm building group*'. In this case because of its scale and massing the retention of the building is not appropriate.

The submitted plans show that alterations would be made to the building to try to improve its overall appearance. These include replacing the existing grey sheeting with dark-stained vertical boarded timber on the sides and with dark coloured sheeting on the roof; and by cladding the concrete blockwork in natural stone. It is also proposed to add two sets of ridge style rooflights, and to screen some of the wider openings with sliding panels of timber fins. Whilst these features would improve the appearance of the building to some extent, they are not sufficient to overcome the fundamental policy objections. We consider in particular that the proposed high level glazing together with the proposed new window openings in the stonework would outwardly demonstrate that the building is in residential use, which would confuse its identity. Notwithstanding these changes, the untraditional and large massing of the building. Its domination of the setting of the adjacent traditional shippon would remain unaltered and indeed would be perpetuated by allowing a permanent residential use.

41. As stated above the building is visible from the minor road that runs approximately 800m to the south of the site. From here the new high level windows in the south elevation of the barn would in particular signal the residential use of the building, especially at night when internally lit.

Farm Diversification

42. The Authority's policies seek to support appropriate farm diversification schemes as has been demonstrated by the previous planning approvals at Blaze Farm. However policy DME2 makes it clear that new business uses should remain ancillary to the agricultural operation of the farm business, meaning that the new business use is a subsidiary or secondary use or operation associated with the agricultural unit. Without a viability appraisal it is not possible to assess whether financially the tourist related uses (including the current proposals) would cumulatively remain subsidiary to the farm income. However looking at the physical extent of the two uses it is clear that if the current proposals were accepted the tourist based uses would occupy a significant area of floorspace including the majority of the two storey traditional barn and modern lean-to (as holiday unit, café and shop), the new arts and crafts studio (floorspace 174 sq m) and the proposed holiday accommodation (432 sqm). Whilst there would still be a fairly substantial agricultural operation taking place, due to the extent of the use now proposed it is likely that the tourist based uses would no longer remain subsidiary or secondary, contrary to DME2.

Other Issues

43. A protected species survey was submitted with the application but it does not cover the subject building. A protected species survey is not in fact required in the case because of the age and materials of construction of the building.
44. Because of the relatively remote nature of the application site there would no impact upon residential amenity as a result of the proposed development.

45. Visibility from the access onto the A54 is adequate and there would be sufficient parking space within the existing yard to meet the needs of the development in accordance with DMT6.

Conclusion

46. In conclusion the proposals are for the conversion of a wholly untraditional modern portal framed agricultural shed, which is of no historic or vernacular merit, to holiday accommodation contrary to Core Strategy policies GSP2 and RT2 and Development Management Policy DME2. The proposal would perpetuate the continued presence of a building that does not accord with the local building tradition because of its massing, detailing and materials. The proposed changes to the external appearance of the building would not outweigh the fundamental policy objections, and would in themselves not address the problems of scale or massing. The proposals are of a scale that, when taken cumulatively with the existing uses, mean that the tourist based business would be unlikely to remain ancillary and secondary to the use of the site for agriculture contrary to DME2.

47. Human Rights

48. Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.
49. List of Background Papers (not previously published)
50. Nil
51. Report Author: Andrea Needham, Senior Planner (South)