

6. FULL APPLICATION – RENOVATION AND CHANGE OF USE OF FORMER SHIPPON TO DETACHED DWELLING, BLEAK HOUSE, NEWTOWN, LONGNOR (NP/SM/0514/0468, P.8476, 406398 363377, 02/04/2014/KW)

APPLICANT: MRS MARIA KILLORAN

Introduction

This application has been referred back to Planning Committee following the meeting on the 13 June. At that meeting a motion to refuse the application was rejected, with members seeking further information to better understand the financial circumstances facing the applicant. At that meeting the Director of Planning advised that a decision to approve the application would be a departure from Development Plan policy which would have to be referred to a subsequent Committee so that the potential impact of an approval on adopted policy could be assessed. The following report therefore incorporates advice from the Policy Planning Manager

Site and Surroundings

Bleak House is an isolated detached cottage situated in a prominent roadside position on the north-eastern edge of the loose-knit collection of properties at Newtown about 2 miles south-west of Longnor village.

There is a small range of detached buildings immediately to the east of the cottage comprising a single-storey traditional outbuilding, a prefabricated single garage building and a larger 1½-storey corrugated sheet building. Immediately next to this building, situated within the adjacent paddock, is the small single-storey shippon building that is the subject of this planning application. Between this building and the roadside frontage of the paddock is a timber stable building, which was erected without the benefit of planning permission. The rear wall of the shippon abuts a minor lane.

The shippon presently has a single-storey form and is clad in natural gritstone with a corrugated roof. There is a smaller timber building attached to its eastern gable. It was formerly a low 1½ storey building, but at some time in the past it was lowered in height and remodelled to form a simple single-storey outbuilding with a monopitch roof. The building is mainly single-aspect with all but two of its openings on the south roadside-facing elevation. These openings are provided with attractive dressed gritstone surrounds and quoinwork. There is a low window opening immediately above a ground floor window opening on the front elevation, which suggests that the original building probably had a low 1½-storey form.

Vehicular access is via the road to the front of the property which leads to a small courtyard parking area in front of the outbuilding complex.

The building has limited architectural merit and due to the extent of the changes and alterations to the original building, the resultant building is not considered to be a 'valued vernacular' building for the purposes of Core Strategy policy HC1 C I.

Proposal

The current application seeks permission for the renovation and extension of the building to form an open-market dwelling for the applicant's daughter and partner. The proposed scheme would restore the building back to its original 1½-storey form with a traditional pitched roof clad in Staffordshire Blue plain clay tiles to match the house. The proposed scheme would utilise all the existing openings with only one additional first floor window opening provided within the eastern gable wall. Due to the low eaves height, however, four conservation rooflights are proposed in the roof, three of which are to be installed in the rear roof slope.

The scheme also proposes the removal of the 1½-storey corrugated sheet building and the unauthorised timber stables are to be removed and the frontage land restored to a paddock. The existing vehicular access is to be shared between the two properties and separate parking/manoeuvring space for the new dwelling is to be provided within the space formerly occupied by the corrugated sheet building. A small garden area is to be provided to the south and eastern sides of the converted barn, which would be enclosed with drystone walling.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be REFUSED for the following reasons.

- 1. The current application fails to meet the requirements of Core Strategy Policy HC1 C I as the building is not a 'valued vernacular' building.**
- 2. In the absence of any overriding justification to allow an exceptional approval for the converted building to become a house that would be made available on the open market to meet general demand, the proposals are also contrary to Local Plan Policy LH1, Core Strategy Policy HC1 A I and policies in the National Planning Policy Framework because the proposed development would not provide an affordable house to meet an identified local need**

Key Issues

1. The principle of the open-market dwelling conversion scheme.
2. The scope for precedent.
3. The impact of the proposed dwelling use on the surrounding landscape character.

History

August 2011 – Enforcement file commenced in respect of the erection of the timber stable building.

August 2013 – Planning application submitted for the conversion/remodelling of the shippon building to an open-market dwelling. The scheme included the provision of a two-storey side extension and the insertion of five rooflights in the main roadside-facing roofslope. The scheme also proposed the removal of the timber stables and the land to the front of the shippon used as a garden.

The application was subsequently withdrawn by the applicant following concerns raised by officers in respect of the conversion to an open-market dwelling and design/landscape concerns about some aspects of the proposed conversion scheme.

December 2013 - site meeting with applicant and Authority officers following the withdrawal of the planning application. Officers advised the applicant that whilst the building had some attractive detailing to the surrounds on the front elevation, this was not sufficient in itself for the building to be classed as a valued vernacular building. Although it was acknowledged that the remodelling of the building and removal of adjacent untraditional buildings and the stable building would improve and enhance the building and the setting of Bleak House, these were not considered to be sufficient to justify an open-market conversion as the existing building was not a 'valued vernacular' building.

The applicant was advised that conversion to a local needs dwelling or ancillary living accommodation may be acceptable as these would more readily meet the aims of the Core

Strategy. Consequently, officers advised that they would not be able to support a planning application for conversion of the building to an open-market dwelling in this location.

Consultations

Highway Authority – no objections subject to conditions requiring the access visibility improvements shown on the submitted plans being undertaken and the proposed parking/manoeuvring spaces provided prior to the occupation of the dwelling.

District Council – No reply to date.

Parish Council – Supports the application providing the renovation is done to an acceptable standard.

Representations

One letter of support has been received from a nearby resident who was formerly Quarnford Parish Council member and a former member of the PDRHA.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27 March 2012 and replaced a significant proportion of central government planning policy with immediate effect. The Government's intention is that the document should be considered to be a material consideration and carry particular weight where a development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date.

In the National Park the development plan comprises the Authority's Core Strategy 2011 and saved policies in the Peak District National Park Local Plan 2001. Policies GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, DS1 and HC1 in the Authority's Core Strategy provide a clear starting point consistent with the National Park's statutory purposes for the determination of this application. It is also 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.

Of particular note is the fact that the NPPF says local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as where such development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or where the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and lead to an enhancement to the immediate setting, for example, which are essentially the same criteria that are set out in Core Strategy Policy HC1.

Along with the need to give great weight to considerations for the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage, paragraph 115 of the NPPF confirms the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty, reflecting primary legislation. It points out (footnote 25) that further guidance and information, including explanation of statutory purposes, is provided in the English National Parks and the Broads Vision and Circular 2010.

Main Policies

Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, DS1, HC1, , L1 and L3

Relevant Local Plan policies: LH1, LC4, LC8, and LT11

DS1 provides the strategy for the spatial distribution of development in order to encourage sustainable development and landscape protection. Furthermore it sets out the principles for limited development opportunities in the open countryside. GSP1 requires all new development in the National Park to respect and reflect the conservation purpose of the National Park's statutory designation and promotes sustainable development ; GSP2 supports development that would enhance the valued characteristics of the National Park; L1 requires that development must conserve and enhance landscape character as identified in the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan, and other valued characteristics; L3 requires that development must conserve and where appropriate enhance or reveal the significance of archaeological, architectural, artistic or other historic assets and their settings. Landscape and conservation policies must then be read alongside Core Policy HC1 which sets out the Authority's approach to new housing in the National Park including the way that heritage assets may be conserved and enhanced to provide housing using the "valued vernacular" test; LC4 and GSP3 set out further design and development management criteria to assess the acceptability of all new development in the National Park, while LC8 sets out specific criteria applicable to buildings of historic or vernacular merit. Policy LT11 requires that the design and number of parking spaces associated with residential development should respect the valued characteristics of the area.

Detailed advice on the conversion of buildings to other uses is provided in the PDNPA's 1987 and 2007 Design Guides.

Wider Policy context (if relevant)

Relevant Core Strategy (CS) policies: GSP4,

Assessment

Issue 1 – The principle of the open-market dwelling conversion scheme.

Bleak House and the adjacent range of outbuildings, including the application building are situated in a prominent roadside position well outside any DS1 settlement. For the purposes of the Development Plan, therefore, the building clearly lies in open countryside. In common with Government guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework, the Authority's housing policies do not permit new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances.

In this case, the applicant has not set out any special circumstances (such as a demonstrated local need for affordable housing or an essential need to conserve and enhance a significant heritage asset) and is simply seeking permission for the former shippon to be remodelled back to its original character, form and appearance and used as an open-market dwelling. The agent's supporting Design and Access Statement states that Bleak House has been owned and occupied by the applicant and her daughter over the last eight years and they have been joined by her daughter's partner within the last year.

The applicant considers that Bleak House is a relatively small dwelling and too restricted for an extended family unit. The applicant's daughter and partner wish to have a family in the future and also wish to have their own independence for their own family in the future. All of the family unit are active members of the parish and the surrounding areas with all parties working within a few miles of Longnor, in or around the National Park boundaries and supporting local businesses.

With the high cost of property within the National Park and surrounding areas, they state that they have found it impossible to find a suitable property that meets their aspirations, especially one that allows her to be near to her mother and the strong family ties. Consequently, they argue that the conversion of the former shippon provides an opportunity to provide an independent home for them, and also a step on the residential property ladder within the locality.

The justification provided for the application is to create a separate residential unit without a tie to Bleak House.

The agent states that due to financial constraints on funding this type of project, an open-market dwelling is the only feasible way forward as ancillary accommodation, local needs and affordable housing are all difficult to finance. The agent also refers to the statements within the National Planning Policy Framework, which support the principle of the current proposal. The additional information requested from the applicant has not yet been received, but it will be reported to the meeting if it has been received by that time.

Notwithstanding these supporting statements, the starting point for development of this kind in the National Park is set out in Core policies GSP 2 (Seeking opportunities for enhancement), DS1 (Development Strategy), L3 (Heritage assets and their significance) and HC1 C I (The creation of new dwellings) and which collectively aim to direct investment towards locations and uses that will create the most sustainable pattern of development at a rate that is compatible with landscape protection. In the open countryside a proposal for unrestricted open market housing justified by conservation and enhancement alone must utilise a heritage asset of significance (under the valued vernacular test in HC1), or else investment should be directed towards other plan priorities, such as locally needed affordable housing or visitor accommodation. Another option explored by officers is the re-use of the building for ancillary domestic use, which may extend the residential offer in a way that creates flexible living options for an expanding family. For an open market dwelling the resultant scheme must demonstrate that the conversion to an open-market dwelling is required to achieve conservation and/or enhancement of the 'valued vernacular' or listed building. For the purposes of interpreting the "valued vernacular" test and seeking consistency with the NPPF, the proposals for the conversion of such buildings must be assessed for their significance as a heritage asset, including the impact development would have on the setting of that heritage asset.

The key issue in this case is whether the principle of the proposed open-market conversion/restoration would comply with the Authority's Core Strategy policies GSP2, HC1 C I and L3. Policy GSP 2 states, amongst other things, that opportunities for enhancing the valued characteristics of the National Park will be acted upon. Proposals intended to enhance the National Park will need to demonstrate that they offer overall benefit to the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area. They should not undermine the achievement of other core policies.

Core Strategy policies HC1 relates to the provision of new housing and states that provision will not be made for housing solely to meet open market demand. Exceptionally, however, new housing (whether newly built or from the re-use of an existing building) can be accepted where it addresses local needs affordable housing or, in accordance with policies GSP1 and GSP2 it is required in order to achieve conservation and/or enhancement of a valued vernacular or listed building. As stated above this test must also draw in consideration of the significance of the building as a heritage asset in order to satisfy Core policy L3 and the NPPF.

In this case, the shippon presently has a single-storey form and is clad in natural gritstone with a corrugated roof. There is a smaller timber building attached to its eastern gable. It was formerly a low 1½ storey building, but at some time in the past it was lowered in height and remodelled to form a simple single-storey outbuilding with a monopitch roof. The building is mainly single-aspect with all but two of its openings on the south roadside-facing elevation. These openings are provided with attractive dressed gritstone surrounds and quoinwork. There is a low window opening immediately above a ground floor window opening on the front elevation, which suggests that the original building probably had a low 1½-storey form.

Officers consider that the building, as altered, has some limited architectural merit, however, due to the extent of the changes and alterations to the original building, the resultant building is no longer considered to be a 'valued vernacular' building for the purposes of Core Strategy policy HC1 C I and not a heritage asset of significance under L3 and the NPPF.

Consequently, your officers consider that the present building is of little or no architectural merit and the proposal therefore fails to meet the first test of Core Strategy policy HC1 C I.

Whilst officers accept that the proposed conversion/remodelling of the building and removal of adjacent untraditional structures would enhance the character, form and appearance of the building and the immediate setting, policy HC1 C I requires that conversion to an open market dwelling is only permissible where the building in question is a 'valued vernacular' building.

Furthermore, the impetus of an open market conversion has to be required in order to achieve conservation or enhancement. In this case it is considered that conversion of the building to either ancillary living accommodation or a local needs dwelling would more readily meet the Authority's Core Strategy housing policies and Local Plan policies LH1 and therefore there is no requirement for an open-market conversion to secure the conservation/enhancement of the building and its setting. There are many sites in the National Park where enhancement of an outbuilding has been achieved through ancillary developments which fall within policy and which do not require an open market dwelling. The agent's supporting statement refers to the fact that conversion to a local needs dwelling is not a viable option, however, no further detailed information has been submitted supporting this statement. Members have requested further information on this point to be reported back to this committee, but at the time of writing this had not been provided. It is considered, therefore, that the proposed open-market conversion would be contrary to Core Strategy policy HC1 C I.

Issue 2 - The scope for precedent

The more remote, scattered nature of the Staffordshire Moorlands means that the opportunities for securing more affordable housing come about less frequently. Policy HC1 recognises that for buildings of greater historic or architectural merit it is less likely to be viable to require individual conversions to be affordable. In this case, however, the building has no significance as a heritage asset and therefore does not meet either the local or national policy tests for conversion to open market housing. Therefore as a simpler, modest building there is greater scope to accord with policy through either ancillary accommodation within the same ownership as the main house, or a dwelling, subject to the normal section 106 restrictions, responding to the local need for affordable housing in the area giving additional space and flexibility for young families to expand and remain close to family networks. The nature of adopted affordable housing policies are such that, while it can be difficult to finance affordable homes, this particular building will only lend itself to providing a modest home. Moreover on subsequent occupation the need for the dwelling is no longer questioned and the home can remain available for another local person meeting the connection criteria. This would not be the case with an open market dwelling which is less likely to serve a local need into the future, thus consolidating the issue further and adding to the development pressures on the National Park in the least sustainable locations.

The issue of precedent is of particular concern where the circumstances are more likely to be replicated, placing a pressure on policy principles as opposed to site specific details. There are many of these more rudimentary ancillary buildings across the National Park which do not display the kind of architectural or historic merit that might elevate them into the bracket of valued vernacular, or assets of high heritage value. An approval of this application would allow the same approach to be adopted across this wide range of buildings, undermining the Development Plan approach and resulting in development in unsustainable locations, contrary to NPPF guidance.

Great care is needed to direct the right investment into the right buildings to achieve the optimum set of uses for the National Park and its communities into the future. The approval of a proposal such as this which would not invest in the heritage of the National Park or supply a more affordable home for future occupants and therefore fail to assist National Park purposes and the sustainable development of the area. Successive applications of a similar type would cumulatively lead to a higher number of unrestricted dwellings in unsustainable locations, contrary to both the development plan and National Park purposes.

Issue 3 - The impact of the proposed dwelling use on the surrounding landscape character.

In addition to the principle for an open-market conversion, the physical impact of the conversion of the barn to a residential use and its impact on the wider landscape setting is also an important consideration, particularly in this case, given the fairly remote roadside position within open countryside. Core Strategy policy HC1 C I states that residential conversion can be accepted where it is required to achieve conservation and enhancement of a valued vernacular building.

In respect of its wider landscape setting, the shippon is immediately adjacent to Bleak House and is to share the existing access and driveway with Bleak House. Bleak House and its adjacent complex of buildings are readily visible in the immediate landscape and from the surrounding road networks. The proposed residential curtilage is fairly compact and is to be bounded by drystone walling. The scheme also includes the removal of the unauthorised timber stable and the returning of the disturbed land as a small paddock. The large corrugated-sheet outbuilding immediately adjacent to the shippon is also to be demolished.

Officers consider that the character and setting of the Bleak House complex would be improved and enhanced by the remodelling of the barn's form and the proposed removal of the untraditional structures, but as noted above, this could be achieved by a development other than an open market dwelling.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the existing stable building is considered to be unauthorised and therefore should be removed and the land restored without requiring the impetus of the proposed conversion scheme.

In respect of the barn conversion scheme itself, the remodelling and restoration of the building back to a low 1½-storey barn with a pitched roof clad in Staffordshire Blue tiles would significantly improve its form and appearance. The proposed scheme is sympathetic to the barn's character with only one new first floor opening proposed in the eastern gable. Whilst four rooflights are proposed these are considered to be acceptable and preferable to new openings being provided in the walls. Overall, this is considered to be a sympathetic building conversion/remodelling scheme that improves and enhances the character, form and setting of the building, the character and setting of Bleak House and consequently the wider landscape setting.

Conclusion

No special circumstances have been set out to warrant an exception in this case and there is real concern that the undermining of core principles regarding sustainable development and heritage management could be replicated many times through the conversion of ancillary buildings across the National Park, redirecting investment away from buildings of real heritage value and failing to take opportunities to secure a more affordable stock of homes for the future.

The additional information which was requested by Members at the meeting in June has not yet been received, but based on information given by the applicant, it is likely to show that they are having difficulty in raising a mortgage for anything other than an open market house. Notwithstanding this, officers have strong concerns that the financial circumstances of the applicants should not provide a justification for a departure from policy in this case, particularly given the fact that many other applicants with local need for affordable housing have accepted such restrictions.

Whilst the proposed scheme would enhance the form and appearance of the existing building and the wider landscape setting, the scheme relates to the conversion/remodelling of a building which is not of sufficient architectural merit to be considered a 'valued vernacular' building within the terms of Core Strategy policy HC1. It is also considered that the conversion to an open-market dwelling is not required to achieve conservation and/or enhancement as there are other

uses that would more closely meet the Core Strategy housing policies, such as conversion to a local needs dwelling or ancillary accommodation and that would provide similar benefits. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Core Strategy policies HC1 in parts A and C I and Local Plan policy LH1.

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil