
7. FULL APPLICATION - CHANGE OF USE OF AGRICULTURAL STONE BARN (PART) TO TWO DWELLINGS, BROWNSPIT FARM, LONGNOR (NP/SM/0414/0396, P.3225, 408580 363583, 22/04/2014/KW)

APPLICANT: MR S KIDD

Site and Surroundings

Brownsplit Farm is a working beef farm situated adjacent to the B5053 between Longnor and Warslow, about 1.25km south of Longnor village. The farm complex is situated on a sharp bend in the road on the eastern side of the B5053. The complex comprises a farmhouse and courtyard of detached traditional buildings with modern buildings attached to the north and east sides.

The barn subject of the application is situated on the northern side of the courtyard. It is a traditional two-storey Staffordshire long barn constructed of random-coursed natural gritstone under a natural gritstone slate roof. The barn has only one first floor opening in the main courtyard-facing elevation with a series of vent slit openings either side. There is a modern farm building attached to the rear elevation of the barn. Part of the barn has been used more recently for storage and office in connection with the adjacent farm shop

Although there have been some later ground floor openings inserted into the main courtyard elevation of the barn, it is considered to be a 'valued vernacular' building for the purposes of Core Strategy policy HC1 C I.

Proposal

The current application seeks full planning permission for the change of use of the traditional barn to two open-market dwellings. The western half of the ground floor of the barn is to be retained in agricultural use. The applicant intends to rent the dwellings in order to provide a further source of income for the working farm.

The proposed scheme requires no new openings in the walls; however, two small conservation rooflights are proposed, one in either roofslope. Because of its position within the communal courtyard and the proximity of the adjacent modern farm buildings, there is no outdoor amenity space immediately adjacent to the barn. The agent has, however, submitted plans showing two separate garden amenity areas in a screened area presently used as a woodstore adjacent to the western side of the farmhouse.

Parking for the additional 2-3 cars is to be provided within the communal courtyard area.

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 because it has not been demonstrated that the impetus of the open market value of a new house is required for its conversion, and the submitted scheme does not otherwise offer sufficient meaningful enhancement to the character and appearance of the building, or its setting.**
- 2. The submitted conversion scheme for two open-market dwellings fails to meet the requirements of Core Strategy policy HC1 C I as it fails to demonstrate that the scheme is unable to accommodate at least one of the dwelling units as an affordable local needs dwelling unit.**

- 3. The introduction of residential uses occupied independently of the remainder of the farm holding into the barn, in close proximity to the working farm buildings and farming activities around the barn, would give rise to a poor standard of residential amenity resulting from noise and disturbance for the occupiers of the converted barn. Consequently, the proposed scheme fails to meet the requirements of Core strategy GSP3 and Local Plan policy LC4.**

Key Issues

1. The principle of the open-market dwellings conversion scheme.
2. The impact of the conversion scheme on the traditional building, its setting and the surrounding landscape character.
3. Residential amenity.

History

March 1980 – Permission granted for a 32m x 24m cubicle building.

April 1990 – Permission granted for the conversion of a detached barn to a farm worker's dwelling.

November 1993 – Permission granted for roofing over silage clamp to form a 29m x 14m cattle building.

July 1995 – Permission granted for a 23m x 12m agricultural building.

July 2002 – Permission granted for the conversion of a farm building to ancillary living accommodation.

December 2006 – Permission granted for a replacement 18m x 9m agricultural building and lean-to building.

July 2013 – Permission granted for a lean-to agricultural building 12m x 7.5m.

Consultations

Highway Authority – No objections subject to conditions requiring details of vehicle parking and manoeuvring being submitted and subsequently provided prior to occupation and then retained.

District Council – No reply to date.

Parish Council – Support the application as it will not alter the structure of the existing building and is a classic diversity of a family enterprise.

Representations

Two letters of support have been received on the following grounds:

- Pleased to see this type of application as it shows that people in the Staffordshire Moorlands are striving to find ways of diversifying from the farming they have previously made a living from.
- The proposal will help to satisfy a real need for affordable rental accommodation for all young couples and families that want to stay in the area they were raised in so as not to move miles away from their support networks.

- The use of the buildings for this purpose is surely much better for the local economy and residents to have people staying in the area than having empty buildings.

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 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 CS 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: HC1, GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, L1 and L3

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

CS Policy HC1 sets out the Authority's approach to new housing in the National Park; 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; LC4 and GSP3 set out further criteria to assess the acceptability of all new development in the National Park, while LC8 sets out specific criteria applicable to barn conversions. Policy LH1 lists the criteria that apply to proposals for affordable local needs housing, which includes the requirements that the dwelling should be of an affordable size/type. 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 Authority's 1987 and 2007 Design Guides.

Wider Policy context (if relevant)

Relevant Core Strategy (CS) policies: GSP4, DS1,

Assessment

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

For the purposes of the Development Plan, the Brownspit Farm complex clearly lies in open countryside because the application site lies well outside of physical limits of any village. 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 proposed dwelling houses are intended to meet general demand rather than any functional need or local need. Therefore, the special circumstances in which permission could be granted for the current application are set out in CS Policy HC1 C I which says that in accordance with core policies GSP1 and GSP2 of the Core Strategy, exceptionally, new housing (whether newly built or from re-use of an existing building) can be accepted where it is required in order to achieve conservation and/or enhancement of valued vernacular or listed buildings. Any scheme proposed under HC1 C I that is able to accommodate more than one dwelling unit, must also address identified eligible local need and be affordable with occupation restricted to local people in perpetuity, unless:

III. it is not financially viable, although the intention will still be to maximise the proportion of affordable homes within viability constraints; or

IV. it would provide more affordable homes than are needed in the parish and the adjacent parishes, now and in the near future: in which case (also subject to viability considerations), a financial contribution will be required

The existing traditional stone barn is in a reasonably sound structural condition. It is a traditional two-storey Staffordshire long barn constructed of random-coursed natural gritstone under a natural gritstone slate roof. The barn has only one first floor opening in the main courtyard-facing elevation with a series of vent slit openings either side. There is a modern farm building attached to the rear elevation of the barn. Part of the barn has been used more recently for storage and office in connection with the adjacent farm shop. Although there have been some later ground floor openings inserted into the main courtyard elevation of the barn, it is considered to be a 'valued vernacular' building for the purposes of Core Strategy policy HC1 C I.

The setting of the barn is presently marred by the proximity of the existing modern farm buildings, particularly the buildings that are attached to its rear (north) elevation. These buildings are currently in use and are to be retained. Consequently, it is considered that the impetus for open-market conversions is not required as the barn is in a reasonable structural condition and there is no significant enhancement of the barn or its setting.

Moreover, the scheme proposes conversion to two open-market dwellings. In such circumstances, if it is accepted that the scheme achieved sufficient conservation/enhancement, then policy HC1 C I requires that one of the units must address identified eligible local need and be affordable with occupancy restricted to local people in perpetuity. In respect of this, the usable floor areas of both units (excluding a communal stair access) fall well within the maximum affordability size guidelines for local needs dwellings quoted in the Local Plan.

This option has been explored with the applicant who does not wish to have a local occupancy restriction attached to one of the dwelling units. He also considers that there is insufficient need in the parish and adjoining parishes to require the local occupancy restriction being attached. However, no supporting information has been submitted substantiate the applicant's claims.

Given that your officers consider that there is insufficient enhancement of the barn and its setting proposed in the submitted scheme and there is insufficient supporting information submitted with the proposal to convince officers that one of the units could not be converted to an affordable local needs dwelling, it is considered that principle of the proposed open-market conversion fails to comply fully with the Core Strategy policy HC1 C I.

Issue 2 – The impact of the conversion scheme on the traditional building, its setting and 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, together with the impact on the wider landscape setting is also an important consideration.

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 and GSP3 and LC4 state that development must respect, conserve and enhance all valued characteristics of the site and buildings. Particular attention will be paid to impact on the character and setting of buildings and a scale of development appropriate to the character and appearance of the National Park. The design should also be in accordance with the National Park Authority Design Guide. L1 further states that development must conserve and enhance valued 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. LC8 sets out specific criteria applicable to barn conversions.

Whilst residential conversions in relatively isolated locations such as this always have some impact, this needs to be more carefully justified when considering open-market conversions. The Authority's policies acknowledge that for conversions to agricultural dwellings or local needs dwellings the landscape impact of the introduction of such a residential use may be accepted on an exceptional basis as it is required to meet other housing policy objectives.

In respect of the physical elements of the traditional barn conversion, the proposed scheme requires no new openings in the walls, but two small conservation rooflights are proposed, one in each roofslope. Because of its position within the communal courtyard and the proximity of the adjacent modern farm buildings, there is no outdoor amenity space immediately adjacent to the barn. The agent has, however, submitted plans showing two separate garden amenity areas in a screened area presently used as a woodstore adjacent to the western side of the farmhouse. Given its fairly well screened position within the farm courtyard and the minimal changes to the appearance of the barn and its immediate setting, it is considered that this is a sympathetic conversion scheme that would conserve rather than enhance its character, appearance and setting, in compliance with the above-stated Core Strategy and Local Plan policies.

Issue 3 - Residential amenity.

Core Strategy policy GSP3 and Local Plan policy LC4 state, amongst other things, that development must respect, conserve and enhance all value characteristics of the site and buildings that are subject to the development proposal. Particular attention should be paid to, amongst other things the form and intensity of the proposed use or activity; the impact upon the living conditions of communities, and the amenity, privacy and security of the development and of nearby properties.

The barn is situated within a communal courtyard which encompasses a variety of activities including a working farm, the associated farm shop and other residential uses which are ancillary to the farm holding. The main ground floor windows to the habitable rooms in the larger unit face the courtyard and there is no outdoor amenity space available immediately adjacent the barn. Additionally, the rear elevation is almost entirely covered by working farm buildings.

Officers have raised concerns about the lack of residential amenities for the proposed dwellings. The agent has submitted additional information which he considers addresses these concerns. This involves the creation of two separate garden areas to the western side of the farmhouse on the opposite side of the courtyard. The agent also states that the nearest existing cow house is about 13m away from the barn. He considers that this distance together with the thickness of the barn walls is sufficient to dissipate any airborne noise arising from the cow shed. The agent also considers that many village dwellings are built near to or adjacent to farm buildings and it has been a long tradition over many years for cow houses to be attached to farmhouses.

Officers consider that the dedication of a detached area of garden space goes some way to mitigating the lack of available outdoor amenity space immediately adjacent to the proposed dwellings. However, the lack of any immediate outdoor space together with the close proximity to the working farm buildings and farming activities around the barn, would give rise to a poor standard of residential amenity resulting from noise and disturbance for the occupiers of the converted barn. Consequently, the proposed scheme fails to meet the requirements of Core Strategy GSP3 and Local Plan policy LC4.

Whilst the agent refers to the tradition of cow houses attached to farmhouses, it is considered that such situations more readily occur where the accommodation is occupied by family members working on the farm. It is also acknowledged in this case that there is no stated intention to sell the proposed dwellings and that it could be argued that any prospective rental occupants will be aware of the substandard range of amenities. Nevertheless, when assessed on their merits as unrestricted open-market dwellings that could be separately owned from the farm, officers consider that the proposed would still be substandard in terms of residential amenities.

Conclusion

The proposals fail to comply with policies within the Core Strategy, specifically HC1C and GSP3. The creation of two open market units without offering significant enhancement or a financial justification, and with the potential for sub-optimal residential amenity, mean that officers recommend refusal of the application.

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