

10/09/0016

MR P TUTCHER

CHANGE OF USE OF BARN TO DWELLING (RESUBMISSION OF 10/08/0033) AT BUTTLES FARM, CHURCHINFORD

319588.111779

Full Planning Permission

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PROPOSAL

The existing building is a stone and corrugated sheet small one and a half storey barn with an adjoining single storey element to the side. The barn sits in a small paddock, bounded by stone walls and hedges, abutting a country lane to the north-west. The barn lies to the south-east of Buttle's Farm, which comprises of a farmhouse and range of modern and traditional buildings. It is the only structure on this side of the road and is surrounded by agricultural fields. The site lies within the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This application seeks permission for the change of use and conversion of the barn to a dwelling, which would consist of two bedrooms and bathroom on the first floor and kitchen and lounge/dining room on the ground floor. The adjoining single storey element would be demolished, retaining only the two sides of natural stone walling. Access would be gained through the existing field access, in the stone wall forming the boundary with the lane.

The application is accompanied by a bat survey report; wildlife survey report; and reptile survey report. It was also accompanied by a structural engineers survey, which found the barn to be in reasonable condition.

A similar application for the conversion of this barn to a dwelling was refused in April 2009 by delegated powers, which also included conversion of the adjoining single storey element to a hall, WC, store and two bay car port. It was refused on sustainability grounds due to the remote area distant from services and facilities and consequent reliance on the private car; the poor state of repair of the single storey element and significant alterations required to convert it to residential use; and the introduction of the residential appearance (domestic paraphernalia and parking/turning area) into the rural environment, to the detriment of the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Members are referred to an application opposite Westcroft, Churchstanton (10/08/0032), refused by committee in January 2009, which is a substantially similar scheme.

CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATION RESPONSES

Consultees

WARD COUNCILLOR - CLLR JOHN THORN -

As the ward councillor, I have visited this site and viewed the barn with the applicant's father, who now lives in Churchinford and who previously owned Buttles Farm until he retired and sold up a few years ago. I have also spoken personally with the nearest neighbours of the barn, who occupy the former farmhouse almost immediately opposite the barn.

This is a resubmission of an application which was refused in April on three grounds, which in essence were:

- The occupants would have to use a car to get around
- Part of the barn need rebuilding or altering
- It would introduce a residential element into the AONB

While I can understand the reasons for refusal, they all appear to be policy-is-black-and-white type reasons which could be trotted out to refuse applications for almost anything within the AONB, and this is an approach to planning which disappoints me deeply.

The use of a car to get around is something which is essential for anybody living in the countryside and until the day arrives when sufficient has been invested in public transport services to allow rural dwellers to be able to catch a bus as regularly as they desire, then it has to be accepted that private cars will be the usual form of transport.

The location of the barn is on a narrow, almost single-track road, but it is a straight stretch of road with good visibility in both directions and flat, wide grass verges which could facilitate passing. It is also a road which can hardly be described as busy, leading to nowhere in particular and having an ultra-low traffic flow, so the addition of another car will have insignificant impact and is not going to make the road unsustainable. I note that the county highways officer does not advise refusal, and, in fact, says a decision on the roads aspect is a matter for the planning committee to consider.

I would consider the pressing need to provide housing within the Deane, and preferably to utilise existing sites rather than greenfield land, would outweigh any concern about highways sustainability.

I note the highways officer is confused about access through the existing stone wall. This will be through an existing gateway which Mr Tutcher senior assures me was there before even he acquired the farm around 40 years ago.

The previous refusal reasons state the proposed dwelling cannot be created 'without significant rebuilding or alteration'. I have to disagree that the barn will need significant rebuilding, while the main alteration is the addition of one window opening in a gable end and a conservation-style rooflight, which is hardly 'significant'. The unsightly corrugated iron roof of the barn will be replaced with a natural slate roof which will make the building much easier on the eye than it is at present. While there is obviously considerable work needed internally, it is not the case that externally there will be significant rebuilding. On my visit, I looked at the first floor of the barn and saw there was grain dust in the air which was clearly dry, indicating the building is weatherproof.

The lean-to at the rear, which would have required significant rebuilding, is actually being demolished to allow for car parking.

As to 'introducing a residential element to the AONB', this is, quite frankly, a nonsensical argument as the barn is located almost exactly opposite an existing 'residential element in the AONB', namely the former Buttles Farmhouse, whose occupants I have spoken to.

Conversion of the barn to a small dwelling will, in fact, tidy up and complement this attractive area. If the property is left as it is, it will simply deteriorate and become an eyesore which will positively detract from the beauty of the AONB countryside. The architects have gone so far as to even retain the existing stone steps on the roadside gable end to the first floor of the barn, which has lately been used as a grain store.

The site in its entirety, including the parking and garden area, is a compact and enclosed site with natural stone walls on all sides, and therefore cannot spill out into the surrounding countryside. The only public view into the site will be from the road, and, as mentioned earlier, it is not a road which is much used.

I firmly believe this is the sort of planning application to bring back into use an otherwise derelict building which the council should be supporting and not hindering. There is an opportunity here to provide a small family home or starter home in a rural area where there is a shortage of accommodation.

At the time of writing, there are five letters of support from eight residents in the nearby area, and the nearest-neighbours have confirmed to me that they have no objections.

The parish council supported the application last time and I am confident they will do so again when they consider this new application at their meeting on 9th September.

I, too, wish to support the application as the ward councillor and I hope that it will be recommended for approval.

SSC - TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT GROUP -

The proposed development site is remote from any urban area and therefore distant from adequate services and facilities, such as, education, employment, health, retail and leisure. In addition, there is no bus service operating, within close proximity of the site. As a consequence, occupiers of the new development are likely to be dependant on private vehicles for most of their daily needs. Such fostering of growth in the need to travel would be contrary to government advice given in PPG13 and RPG10, and to the provisions of policies STR1 and STR6 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review (adopted policies: April 2000).

Notwithstanding the aforementioned comments, it must be a matter for the Local Planning Authority to decide whether the re-use of the barn and/or any other overriding planning need, outweighs the transport policies that seek to reduce reliance on the private car.

It is not clear if the use of the barn will result in additional traffic movements or a substitution as this will depend upon whether the barn's use will need to be re-provided on any adjoining farm/agricultural land that the Applicant owns/control.

A residential or holiday use may generate a similar level of traffic to that of the agricultural use of the barn, but the nature of the trip patterns connected with a

residential use are likely to be very different with a higher level of longer distance trips.

In detail it has been stated in the Design and Access Statement that a vehicular and pedestrian access into the site will be formed through the existing natural stone wall. However it would appear from my site visit that there is already a gateway in this location. Perhaps the planning officer can clarify this point.

CHURCHSTANTON PARISH COUNCIL - The above application was discussed by my Council at its Meeting yesterday and it was agreed by an overwhelming majority that it fully supports the proposals. It is felt that the development of a small residential property on this site is preferable to the continued deterioration of the existing structure. Its "sustainability" is thought to be equal to other buildings in the neighbourhood and that its conversion (and associated paraphernalia) would not have an adverse impact on the AONB - it might, in fact, have a positive impact on said Area.

NATURE CONSERVATION & RESERVES OFFICERS -

Three wildlife reports which formed part of the application 10/08/0033 have been submitted with this application along with a supporting letter from Acorn Ecology dated 6th August 2009, confirming that the situation with regard to bats and reptiles remains unchanged. No bird nests were noted in earlier surveys but the surveyor found nests (swallow and robin/wren) this year. The advice given in the 2008 report to carry out works outside of the nesting season therefore still stands. I support the recommendation to provide bird boxes. I agree that the earlier reports if read in conjunction with the letter are still valid and so support earlier comments made by Ms Motum. (see below)

Comments made by Ms Motum under previous application.

Acorn's submitted reports include an emergence survey for bats (June 2008) and a reptile survey (June 08). The report concludes that bats are not using the building to be converted but there is potential for bats to roost; reptiles are not present. I support the report Conclusion 41.1 for careful work to protect bats.

In applying PPS9 and TDLP EN4 I advise that future provision is made for bats – this could be through the design of the roof ridge to allow crevice dwelling bats to enter small cavities or the provision of a bat box on placed high up on the south east gable end. Suggest conditions and notes to applicant.

HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE OFFICER - My main concern is the change of character from farm buildings to residential. It may be possible to provide some landscape mitigation but overall, given its location within the Blackdown Hills AONB, the proposals will be detrimental to policy EN10.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH - NOISE & POLLUTION - Comments awaited.

Representations

10 letters of support have been received from 9 different households on the grounds of:

- Property is in a bad condition, pity to see it deteriorating, could become an eyesore. This application could save property and enhance its appearance.
- Barn no longer viable as an agricultural building but could make a small dwelling, possibly affordable for a starter home.
- Barn is attractive in a prominent position next to the road.

- There is a shortage of Country housing for locals. This could be “affordable housing” due to its size, for a local young family helping the rural economy and local amenities. This size and type of property is exactly what the area needs.
- The barn would integrate with existing buildings at Buttles Farm.
- Previous reason was primarily due to need of a motor vehicle, but in a rural area all properties need a car to function and this will always be the case.
- Road is of a good standard for the amount of extra traffic this would produce.
- Permission has recently been granted for a barn conversion at Kedget Barton, Churchstanton.
- Primary school at Churchstanton is an easy walk or cycle ride away and Churchinford village is only 1.5 miles away.

Other non-planning issues also raised:

- Applicant was born at this property. If planning was granted the property would be there should the siblings need to look after their elderly parents who now live in the village.
- Applicant has relatives in Churchinford
- If left to deteriorate, barn could become dangerous to children and animals.

PLANNING POLICIES

PPS7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas,
 STR6 - Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages,
 S&ENPP3 - S&ENP - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty,
 S&ENPP5 - S&ENP - Landscape Character,
 S1 - TDBCLP - General Requirements,
 S2 - TDBCLP - Design,
 S7 - TDBCLP - Outside Settlement,
 H7 - TDBCLP - Conversion of Rural Buildings,
 EN4 - TDBCLP -Wildlife in Buildings to be Converted or Demolished,
 EN10 - TDBCLP - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty,

DETERMINING ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Members are referred to an application determined by committee in January 2009 opposite Westcroft, Churchstanton. This application was refused on the grounds of: (1) unsustainable location remote from services and facilities which would require reliance on the private car; (2) barn not of permanent and substantial construction and would require significant alterations to convert to residential use; and (3) conversion to residential by virtue of introduction of paraphernalia of domestic living and installation of driveway would introduce a residential element into a rural environment, eroding the rustic nature of the site, failing to preserve and enhance the rural beauty of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

It is important that members are aware of the significant similarities between these two sites in order to maintain consistency.

In addition, it is important to note that there are also several recent refusals of barn conversions to residential use, which have been dismissed at appeal. At Great Herswell Farm, West Buckland (Application Reference: 42/08/0024) (decision date

25th March 2009) the inspector concluded that “In sustainability terms, I certainly do not consider that the benefits of converting it to permanent residential use would outweigh the harm caused by creating another dwelling in the countryside, remote from services and facilities”. Whilst at Church Farm, Culmhead (Application Reference: 29/08/0004) (decision date 26th March 2009), a different inspector concluded “Notwithstanding my finding that the harm to the character and appearance of the complex could be mitigated through removal of the dividing wall, this does not outweigh the harm I have identified in relation to the increased traffic and sustainability of a further residential unit on this site.”

A supporter referred to a barn recently granted approval for conversion to residential use at Kedge Barton. This was granted in May 2005, therefore in excess of four years ago. There has been a significant drive in achieving sustainability since then, as supported by the appeal decisions referred to above.

The barn at Buttles Farm lies in a remote countryside location, some distance from any urban area and therefore distant from adequate services and facilities, such as education, employment, health, retail and leisure. There are no public transport services in close proximity to the site and therefore very limited transport opportunities other than the private car. As such, occupiers of a residential unit in this location would be largely dependent on private vehicles, rendering this an unsustainable form of development. The barn is not considered to be of any significant historic or architectural importance or interest, nor does it contribute to the local area significantly to justify a need to preserve it. It is not therefore believed that there are any significant planning merits of this proposal that would outweigh the highway sustainability concerns raised.

The existing barn is small and its conversion would provide very limited accommodation, which could result in significant future pressure for further extensions, to the detriment of the traditional character of the barn. Paragraph 17 of PPS7 refers to the need to take account of the suitability of different types of buildings for re-use. In view of the limited size of the barn and the adjoining single storey element not being of permanent or substantial construction, it is not considered that the barn in question lends itself to conversion to residential use.

The site lies within the countryside of the Blackdown Hills AONB, where the natural beauty should be preserved and enhanced and development should not adversely affect the landscape character or appearance. The conversion of the barn, provision of associated amenity space and installation of the parking/turning area, would domesticate the appearance in a rural area that currently forms part of an agricultural field. Whilst the existing stone wall boundaries and incorporating the parking, dustbin and drying area within the area of the former single storey element and close to the barn, would reduce this impact slightly, this is not considered to be to an acceptable level that would not materially change the rural character of the building and surrounding curtilage to a domestic one. As such, the introduction of the paraphernalia of domestic living would erode the rustic character of the site and fail to preserve and enhance the rural beauty of this part of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

RECOMMENDATION AND REASON(S)

Recommended Decision: Refusal

- 1 The site is remote from any urban area and therefore distant from adequate services and facilities, such as, education, employment, health, retail and leisure and there are no public transport services in close proximity to the site. As a result, occupiers of the proposed dwelling are likely to be dependent on private vehicles for most of their daily needs, which would foster a growth in the need to travel and it is not considered that there are sufficient planning merits of the proposal to outweigh the highway sustainability issues raised. On this basis, the proposal is contrary to advice given in PPG13 and RPG10 and policies STR1 (Sustainable Development) and STR6 (Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages) of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review and policy S1(b) of the Taunton Deane Local Plan.
- 2 The site lies within a rural part of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where the natural beauty should be preserved and enhanced and development should not adversely affect the landscape character or appearance. The conversion of the barn, by virtue of the introduction of paraphernalia of domestic living, along with the installation of a parking/turning area, would introduce a residential element, into a rural environment. The rustic nature of the site and the surrounding landscape would be eroded, which would fail to preserve and enhance the character of the landscape and the rural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. As such, the proposal is contrary to policies P3 (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and P5 (Landscape Character) of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review and policies S1 (General Requirements), H7 (Conversion of Rural Buildings) and EN10 (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) of the Taunton Deane Local Plan.

RECOMMENDED CONDITION(S) (if applicable)

Notes for compliance

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1988.

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