

11/2002/007

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8

MR & MRS MAHON

CHANGE OF USE OF TWO HOLIDAY LETS TO A SINGLE DWELLING AT QUANTOCK COTTAGE, SEVEN ASH.

15190/33340

FULL PERMISSION

PROPOSAL

Planning permission was granted in February 1997 for the change of use and sub-division of the former Stags Head Public House at Seven Ash near Combe Florey and the conversion of the skittle alley to 2 holiday lets. The application has been implemented. This application is for the change of use of these 2 holiday lets to a single dwelling. There are no external alterations apart from the demolition of a small extension to improve the access/turning arrangements. The residential curtilage is formed by the existing boundaries.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY the site is located adjacent to the A358, in an area which is remote from local services and facilities, education or employment opportunities. Residents would be dependant on the private vehicle for their daily needs. This would constitute unsustainable development in terms of transport policy, as the proposal will foster growth in the need to travel and increase reliance on the private motorcar. This is contrary to advice contained within PPG14, RPG10 and the provision of Policy STR1 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan review. Planning history shows a recommendation of refusal by County Highways Authority for the conversion of the skittle alley to 2 holiday lets and draws the attention to the poor alignment and lack of forward visibility at the junction with the A358. This situation has not been improved and the junction is extremely substandard given the speed of traffic on the main road. Whilst I do not consider that the junction is adequate to serve the proposed dwelling it is unlikely to generate significant additional traffic movements over and above that which was created by the 2 holiday lets. Therefore the Local Planning Authority must consider whether the planning merits of the case outweigh the highway safety and sustainability issues raised.

DRAINAGE OFFICER note that the foul drainage is to drain to the existing sealed system. Recommend note regarding existing drainage systems and the possibility of overloading and public health nuisance. TOURISM OFFICER I am eager to assist in safeguarding the future economic benefits of tourism to the local economy and to the host communities it serves. The loss of any holiday accommodation is regrettable but in this instance the establishment has the potential to continue to play an important role in the local economy and the tourism sector. This proposal requires careful assessment and I would like you to consider the following information. Quantock Cottage is situated on the edge of the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which attracts

approximately 440,000 visitors per year. Seven Ash is situated close to our largest visitor attraction the West Somerset Railway, wonderful countryside and villages providing local shops and pubs such as Crowcombe, West Bagborough and Triscombe. Quantock Cottage has never taken the opportunity to promote itself through any of our tourism publications and in particular the annual visitors guide which research has highlighted provides accommodation providers in the Deane with 30-95% of all known bookings. The cottage is located in one of Somerset's tourism honey pots and is ideally equipped to attract walkers and cyclists. This is not one of the areas in the Deane that is suffering from holiday accommodation saturation and there is still potential for growth. There is immense potential for future tourism development on the hills and surrounding area working in partnership through the 'Coleridge Way Project' linking Exmoor and Quantock Hills, EU funding (Leader+) in the neighbouring areas of Blackdown Hills and Somerset Levels and Moors. Equine tourism, cycling and teashop tourism projects are already under development in the area (Manor Farm, Broomfield, trekking, Fasttracks mbt offering mountain bike packages) and 'Green Ways' project on the hills will be developed further to offer extensive bridle, cycle and foot paths.

WEST BAGBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL (neighbouring Parish Council) no objections to this proposal. In fact it is thought that a change to a single dwelling would be an advantage to the village.

1 LETTER OF CONCERN raising the following issues:- septic has leaked in the past so the septic tank is not capable of dealing with the current loading let alone the extra effluent generated by another permanent dwelling.

POLICY CONTEXT

The West Deane Local Plan (adopted May 1997) is the adopted local plan for this site. WD/SP/3 (Conversion of buildings outside settlement uses for small scale industrial, warehousing, commercial, tourist and recreational uses) and WD/SP/4 (Conversion of buildings outside settlement limits to residential uses) are relevant. Here, the conversion of buildings to residential use will only be permitted where the criteria of policy SP/3 are met and where it would not harm the rural character of the area and the historic or architectural qualities of the building. WD/EC/16 (Special landscape areas) applies. In such areas, the Borough Council will exercise strict control of development and encourage positive measures of enhancement.

Structure Plan Policy 23 states that outside settlements or defined Tourism Development Areas, the priority is to improve existing attractions and accommodation and to mitigate the environmental impact of existing development. West Deane Local Plan Policy WD/RT/1 encourages proposal for tourism development where they diversify tourism opportunities, provide alternatives to areas of excessive tourist pressure and support the local economy.

In the assessment of this application the following Taunton Deane Local Plan Revised Deposit (November 2000) policies are relevant:- S1 (General requirements), S2

(Design) S3 (Energy conservation) H9 (Conversion of rural buildings). Here, the conversion of buildings to residential use will not be permitted unless the building to be converted is of permanent and substantial construction and is in keeping with its surroundings, has a size and structure suitable for conversion without major rebuilding or significant extension and alteration, is unlikely to attract a suitable business re-use, is sited near a public road with convenient access by foot, cycle, or public transport to a settlement, will not harm the architectural or historic qualities of the building, does not involve the creation of a residential curtilage which would harm the rural character of the area, and will not lead to a dispersal of activity on such a scale as to prejudice town and village vitality.

ASSESSMENT

The applicant's agent argues that the holiday lets were let in 2000 for a total of 7 weeks and in 2001 they were let 4 times. The agent advises that the properties have been extensively marketed and the low return is due to the location of the building so close to the main road. The applicant's agent has also enclosed, as part of the application, letters from a holiday company indicating that they were unprepared to market the holiday lets due to the location close to the main road and letters from holiday makers who indicate that the location close to the road does not make it attractive for tourism purposes. It can be argued that the applicants should have considered the proximity of the main road at the time of researching whether the skittle alley should be converted to the 2 holiday lets and presumably considered it to be a worthwhile venture at that time. As amplified by the Tourism Officer, the properties have not been advertised in Taunton Deane Borough Council's literature and no further evidence of the marketing strategy has been submitted with the application. In light of there being minimal external alterations and the residential curtilage remaining the same, I consider that the proposal does not affect the appearance or character of the building or the street scene. However, currently the adjacent dwelling and the holiday lets are in the same ownership. The use of the former skittle alley as a separate dwelling, where there is no relationship with the adjoining dwelling (the former pub), is likely to have a more adverse impact on that property. However, I do not feel that this relationship is so adverse as to warrant refusal of the application on loss of amenity grounds. The form and character of the building are not compromised. It can be argued that there might be a reduction in traffic to and from the site as the number of planning units on the site is being reduced from 2 to 1. In light of this, I consider that the proposal would not lead to an overloading of the access roads causing any road safety problems or environmental degradation. The developers are being guided to incorporate measures to minimise the use of energy and water in the use of the building. With regard to assessing the application against the current and emerging policies, the application requires careful consideration. Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides that development control decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Whilst there are policies which encourage the formation of tourism accommodation for the benefit of the economy, there are no specific policies which seek to protect the loss of accommodation. However the Structure Plan Policy 23 states that outside of settlements or defined Tourism Development Areas, the priority is to improve existing attractions and accommodation and to mitigate the environmental impact of the existing development. The holiday units were permitted in order to provide accommodation for tourists in an area with tourist potential and where new residential development is normally restricted. The holiday lets

are likely to have a more positive impact on local employment and the economy than the proposed residential use. Hence it is considered that the loss of the positive effect that the tourism use may have on the local economy is a significant material consideration and my recommendation is to follow the ethos of the positive tourism policies and refuse the loss of this tourism accommodation.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be REFUSED on the grounds that the proposal would result in the loss of tourist accommodation in an area of tourism potential contrary to the aims of Structure Plan Policy 23 and Local Plan Policy WD/RT/1. The proposal would also conflict with policies and aims of the Council's Tourism Strategy 1999 - 2004 which encourage a choice of accommodation for such tourist in areas not suffering from holiday accommodation saturation and where there is still potential for growth

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

CONTACT OFFICER: 356462 MRS J HIGGINBOTTOM

NOTES: