

20/2006/029

MR & MRS FLOYD

CONVERSION OF BARN TO DWELLING, FORMATION OF ACCESS TRACK AND IMPROVEMENTS TO ACCESS ONTO LODES LANE, THE BARN OS FIELD NO 9138, LODES LANE, KINGSTON ST MARY

321900/130380

FULL

PROPOSAL

The barn is located in an isolated position in the open countryside in the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, some distance to the north of Kingston St Mary, well outside the village development limit. It consists of part of the main barn with stone walls and an open ended section where walls are missing and have been patched with concrete blocks. Only part of the roof remains. Attached to the side was a long lean-to with a corrugated iron roof on timber supports and a part end wall, most of which has collapsed. Around the barn are the remains of a stone wall, with large sections missing. The application site extends to this wall and beyond it into the field at the front of the barn.

The proposal involves a change of use and conversion to a 3 bedroom dwelling. The proposed scheme utilises all the existing openings in the main barn with 1 new window and 5 roof lights, but involves sections of rebuilding of walls, roof and the whole of the lean-to. The building is some 460 m from the road, and access is shown on the plan as a track. However, there is little evidence on the ground of a track other than deep ruts in the grassed field. In addition to the formation of a track across 2 fields, a new section of driveway 100 m long would be formed over the top of a hill to Lodes Lane.

The application was accompanied by a Design and Access Statement, a Structural Engineer's Survey of the Barn - this concludes that the barn has been found to be in a reasonable structural condition and suitable for conversion into a dwelling, with attention to a number of minor, maintenance items. Wildlife Survey - this concludes that no signs of any protected species were found. Tree Survey - commercial Viability Report. No marketing exercise has been carried out but a Property Specialist's report concludes "We strongly believe that there will be no serious interest in the subject premises from either light industrial or office occupiers. This is an undesirable location and situation for commercial use."

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

LANDSCAPE OFFICER the barn is clearly visible within the rural landscape (AONB) and its change of use would change detrimentally the landscape character of the area, Policies EN10 and EN12. The proposed "trackway" is not stoned(at present) or surfaced and therefore its construction and use as a driveway would have a detrimental effect on the rural character of the area, Policies EN10 and EN12. The proposed access has poor visibility that is likely to require hedgerow removal that

again would be detrimental to the rural character of the area, Policies EN10, EN12 and EN6. The existing group of trees provide a considerable amenity in the landscape but I agree with the proposed tree management and felling proposals in the interest of longer term health and amenity. NATURE CONSERVATION AND RESERVES OFFICER satisfied that protected species would not be harmed by the proposal.

PARISH COUNCIL supports the application provided that it stays within the footprint of the existing buildings. As the property lies within the AONB, care should be taken to minimise the effect of the provision of services such as phone and power.

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE object. While the design and background work on this application seems sensitive and comprehensive there is a fundamental problem of location as indicated in the driveway of over half a kilometre which would need to be created for access. The changes involved in converting this agricultural building to domestic use will harm the character of this very rural part of the AONB. The objection is in line with section 4.6 iii of the Management Plan which states "The significance of structures in the AONB landscape is very high. Where these are old, locally distinctive barns and farmsteads they contribute an important element to the AONB countryside. Some old agricultural buildings may be so significant to the character of the area that they should be maintained unchanged despite the end of their serviceable lives. A more satisfactory option is sensitive conversion to an appropriately scaled rural enterprise, while conversion to domestic use is less acceptable due to changes in character and use. Design and location are critical in any barn conversion."

POLICY CONTEXT

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policy 3 (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) states that conservation of the landscape should be given priority over other planning considerations in AONB's.

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 - General Requirements sets out general requirements for new developments, S2 - Design requires development to be of a good design, EC6 - Conversion of Rural Buildings allows rural buildings to be converted to commercial uses subject to various criteria, H7 - Conversion of Rural Buildings states that the conversion of rural buildings to residential use will not be permitted unless certain criteria are fulfilled, EN4 - Wildlife in Buildings to be Converted protects wildlife, EN5 - Protected Species protects various species, EN6 - Protection of Trees, Woodlands, Orchards and Hedgerows, EN10 - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty gives priority to preserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONB's, EN12 - Landscape Character Areas states that development proposals must be sensitively sited and designed to respect the distinct character and appearance of Landscape Character Areas.

ASSESSMENT

The barn is in a very poor condition with some of the walling and some of the roof and roof structure missing, and the side lean-to has virtually collapsed. The plans show that a substantial amount of new building work will be required. This would not

be acceptable under Policy H7(Conversion of Rural Buildings) which does not allow conversion where major rebuilding or significant extension and alterations are proposed.

There are 2 policies in the Taunton Deane Local Plan for the conversion of rural buildings. Policy EC6 under the economy section encourages the conversion of suitable buildings in the countryside to some form of commercial use. This is not a proposal for such a use, and the property report submitted with it concludes that it is unlikely that a commercial use would be viable. However, this has not been tested by a marketing exercise. The policy for the conversion of a rural building to a residential use (Policy H7) states that such a use will not be permitted unless certain criteria are met. This proposal does not meet some of the criteria as the Policy does not allow major rebuilding, which this application includes, it requires the building to be sited near a public road, which this building is not, and it requires that the proposal does not involve the creation of a residential curtilage which would harm the rural character of the area, which, it is considered by the Landscape Officer, and the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee, this one would.

The barn is not only located in a remote rural area, it is without any satisfactory access. The proposal will involve the construction of a new section of drive for 100 m in length going over the top of a hill towards Lodes Lane, it will also involve the formation of a 360 m length of drive across 2 fields.

There is an existing field gate to Lodes Lane, which the application proposes improvements to. The Landscape Officer considers that such improvements which require hedgerow removal would be detrimental to the rural character of the area.

The barn, which is in a poor condition with parts of the walling and roof structure missing, is located in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, over half a kilometre from a road, without a satisfactory access. This isolated situation is a fundamental problem in terms of the re-use of the building. If it were possible to find a suitable commercial use for the building which would contribute to rural economy and rural employment, but would have little impact visually on the building or its surroundings, then the new access drive could be balanced against this. However the policies which give priority to protecting the special character of the exceptional landscape in the AONB's do not allow conversion to residential use unless certain criteria are met. Both the Landscape Officer and the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee object to the proposal because of the impact of the changes to the building, the creation of a residential curtilage and the formation of the excessive length of access drive, which would be so detrimental to the rural character of the area that the proposal is contrary to the policies for those areas.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be REFUSED for the following reasons (1) The site lies outside the defined limits of a settlement and within the countryside where the conversion of rural buildings to residential use will not be permitted unless certain criteria are fulfilled. In this case, the proposal does not fulfil some of the criteria as major rebuilding is proposed, no marketing exercise has been undertaken to establish whether a suitable business use would be attracted, the building is not near a public

road, and it would involve the creation of a residential curtilage which would harm the rural character of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where priority will be given to preserving and enhancing the natural beauty. The proposal is therefore contrary to Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies H7 and EN10. (2) The existing "trackway" is not stoned or surfaced at present and therefore its construction and use as a driveway would have a detrimental effect on the rural character of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposal is therefore contrary to Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies EN10 and EN12. (3) The proposed improvements to the access to Lodes Lane are likely to require the removal of hedgerow which would be detrimental to the rural character of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposal is therefore contrary to Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies EN6, EN10 and EN12.

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

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NOTES: