Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 November 2014

by J D Westbrook BSc(Hons) MSc  MRTPI
an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 8 December 2014

Appeal Ref: APP/B2355/A/14/2223715
Carter Place Stables, Hall Park, Acre, Rossendale, BB4 5BQ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Mr Leo Wrigley against the decision of Rossendale Borough Council.
- The application Ref 2014/0261, dated 9 June 2014, was refused by notice dated 11 August 2014.
- The development proposed is the conversion of part of a stables building to a dwelling.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The Council’s decision notice and questionnaire state that the appeal site lies within the Green Belt. However, Green Belt policy was not a reason for refusal, and both the Council and the appellant agree that the proposal would not represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt, nor would it harm the openness of the Green Belt or conflict with any of the reasons for including land within it. On the basis of the evidence before me, I concur with that view.

Main Issues

3. The main issue in this case is the effect of the proposal on the rural economy and on the character and appearance of the countryside around Acre.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is an equestrian complex situated on land between the A56 and Blackburn Road. There is a mobile home residential park immediately to the north-west of the complex and open pasture to the north-east and south. The complex comprises two stable blocks of timber construction to the west of the access driveway; three lorryback-type stables to the east of the driveway; a large open-fronted barn at the southern end of the site; a manege to the north of the barn; and a mobile home across the yard from the barn. The mobile home is apparently unauthorised.
5. The proposal involves the construction of a dwelling within 3 of the 4 compartments comprising the open-fronted barn. The three enclosed sides are currently constructed from timber and the dwelling would involve the construction within this building of a two-bedroom dwelling with new inner walls and ceiling, and a new rendered front elevation. The fourth compartment of the barn would remain in use as a stable in its existing format.

6. The appellant contends that the dwelling is required as essential on-site accommodation for a worker associated with the running of the complex as a business. The business includes horse-breeding as well as livery. The large open-fronted barn has 4 compartments used for foaling, each of a greater size than the individual stables used for livery purposes. The other, smaller timber and lorryback stables appear to be able to accommodate around 14 horses in total. The appellant has indicated that some of the smaller timber stables could be amalgamated to provide the necessary larger floorspace areas needed for foaling, as replacement for those areas lost by virtue of the proposed conversion to a dwelling.

The rural economy

7. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) indicates in paragraph 28 that to promote a strong rural economy, local plans should support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings. In this case, however, it would appear that the equestrian business would contract as a result of this proposal, since there would be fewer stables. Whether or not the existing stables were to be redesigned to accommodate new foaling areas, the reduction in overall space would lead to up to 6 fewer horses being stabled on site.

8. Earlier in 2014, the inspector determining a planning appeal regarding a recent proposal to relocate the unauthorised mobile home on the site concluded that, in that particular case, the proposed development was inappropriate in the Green Belt. He went on to discuss other considerations, including the need for permanent accommodation on site, referring to evidence produced by an equine consultant in 2012.

9. His conclusion was that allowing the appellant to reside on the site would be beneficial for the welfare of the horses. However, he was not convinced by the evidence presented that the requirements of the stables necessitated a permanent presence on the site, or that the possibility of residing on the neighbouring mobile home park had been thoroughly discounted. There is no new evidence before me to indicate that the situation on this issue has significantly changed in the interim period, and I note that the scale of the equestrian operations on site would be reduced by virtue of the proposal. There is, however, some evidence that the livery element of the operation is important to the financial strength of the business and that this element could be significantly reduced by the relocation of the foaling side of the business into the livery stables. Alternatively, if the scale of the foaling side of the operation were to be reduced or abandoned instead, it would appear to be less important that there should be a permanent presence on site.
10. I find on this issue, therefore, that the proposed conversion would be likely to be harmful to the rural economy. It would lead to a reduction in the scale of operations and potentially, therefore, to a reduction in employment. I accept that in the case of the previous appeal, the proposal was deemed to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and that would not be the situation here. However, the other consideration regarding the effect on the rural economy is unchanged and there is no reason for me to conclude differently from the previous inspector in this matter, particularly since the operations would be reduced in scale.

11. On this basis, therefore, the proposal would conflict with guidance in the NPPF paragraph 28, and also with guidance in the Council’s Supplementary Planning Document on the Conversion and Re-use of Existing Buildings in the Countryside (SPD), which indicates that the conversion of an existing building to a dwelling would need to demonstrate that it met a proven need for such a dwelling for a full-time worker.

**Character and appearance of the countryside**

12. Paragraph 55 of the NPPF indicates that local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as, for example, the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside. This has been dealt with under the previous issue. Another exception relates to a situation where the design of the dwelling is of exceptional quality. In this case, the three existing sides of the barn would have a completely new internal skin, and the fourth side would require a new rendered façade. The result would be something of a compromise between an agricultural building and a single aspect dwelling.

13. On this basis, the proposal would result in an isolated dwelling in the countryside that would not satisfy the exception criteria in the NPPF. It would be separated from the mobile home park to the north by the manege, and would not relate clearly to other nearby dwellings.

14. The appellant notes that he and his wife have built up the business over a number of years and that they wish to continue to live on the site of the stables. I have no reason to suppose that the appellant runs anything other than a careful operation in which the welfare of horses is a key consideration, and I have some sympathy with his situation. However, the dwelling would continue to exist after the appellant ends his association with the operation, and I have no business plan before me to indicate that the business would not merely decline in scale as a result of the proposal.

15. In conclusion on this issue, therefore, I find that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the countryside around Acre, by virtue of the introduction of an isolated dwelling into the area. It would conflict with guidance in the NPPF, and also with guidance in the SPD which requires that a conversion should be in keeping with the style of the building, and that it should also not require extensive rebuilding.

*J D Westbrook*  
INSPECTOR