

OTTERY ST MARY RURAL
(Ottery St Mary)

08/1091/FUL

Target Date: 16.06.2008

Applicant: W J Grigg & Sons

Location: Alfington Farm
Alfington
EX11 1NZ

Proposal: Conversion of agricultural buildings to four dwellings comprising alterations/extension and construction of new vehicular access and parking area

CONSULTATIONS

County Highway Authority

The proposal is for the conversion of agricultural buildings to 4 dwellings comprising alterations/extension and reconstruction of a new vehicular access and parking area at Alfington Farm, Alfington, near Ottery St Mary. The proposed development would be accessed off a recently constructed private access road built in conjunction with a development fronting the B3177 Classified County Road. The application site falls outside the built up area boundary for Alfington and this raises the question of sustainability of the proposal. Alfington lacks shopping, leisure and educational facilities with the nearest facilities being available at Ottery St Mary, approximately 2 miles to the south-west and Honiton approximately 3 miles to the north-east. From a highway view the development is considered unsustainable and refusal is therefore recommended.

Should however, the planning authority consider that the buildings fall within its policy for conversion and are worthy of preservation the highway objection would be withdrawn.

Recommendation

Refuse for the following reasons:

1. The proposed development would be located where it is remote from adequate services, employment, education, public transport etc., and would therefore increase the need for travel by private vehicles contrary to Policies TR2 and TR5 of the Devon County Structure Plan.

Conservation

Essentially traditional farm buildings are characterised by the original fabric; an uncluttered exterior; and unpartitioned interior and an agricultural setting. Any change of use or conversion should seek to retain this character and to accommodate the new use with minimal change, both externally and internally. Their authenticity as traditional farm buildings can only be properly conserved if: the original fabric requires little in the way of re-building and that any changes required can be done in such a way as to retain the essential characteristics and their setting.

Structural Survey: this has been carried out by BSW and confirms that with the exception of Barn D (cob) that they are capable of being refurbished. However, the extent of the work required varies for each individual barn and in some cases will be extensive i.e. Barn F which it is suggested is demolished. It is also noted within the survey that some areas of the barns were not surveyed due to poor light or the unsafe nature of the upper floors. Access was also not possible in some ground floor areas.

Historical or architectural significance: there has been no attempt to correlate the structural survey with the historical or architectural merit of the individual buildings on which to base a full justification of the proposals. It appears that some of the most historic barns are to be demolished. (Barn F) and it is unclear what is happening to the cob barn (D) which appears to be replaced with a new unit (4) – the barns are all curtilage structures, see below.

Elevations: it is difficult to read the elevations in conjunction with the survey drawings. There are a number of fundamental issues that need to be resolved first i.e. agreed demolition, extension and alteration. In addition the architectural merit of the individual barns.

SW 6: Barn F has been demolished and Barn D is unclear, see below. This may require further discussion;

SE 9: this is considerably altered and needs discussion;

NW: the alterations to the entrance opening and the new openings need discussion;

SW10: the openings are all new and too large;

NW 8: it is not clear whether this is a repair or new build – this needs to be clarified;

SE 12: the opening through to the farmhouse has been closed. This needs further consideration. The exposed elevation due to the demolition of Barn F has created a very domestic elevation without any reference to the existing structure. The roof height is considerably raised. The addition of a conservatory is unacceptable, see below.;

NE 11: this is the only remaining part of this elevation other than the rear boundary wall of Barn F. The openings and roof will be raised.

NE 3: this appears to have minimal alteration, but the roof will be raised.

Ground Floor: this may need some adjustment based on the comments above;

First floor: this may need some adjustment based on comments above;

The general absence of extensions and additions to traditional farm buildings is an aspect of their historical interest and authentic character. Conversion schemes that involve the construction of new extensions additions are likely to harm the integrity of the farm buildings/group. The proposed conservatory to unit 3 is unacceptable. Accommodation should be incorporated into the scheme by using the existing envelope without the need for additional extensions.

NB. The barns are considered to be curtilage to the main farmhouse and as such listed building consent is required for demolition, alteration, extension and conversion.

Proposal Unacceptable: fundamental issues relating to structure/conversion

Recommendation

Refuse for reasons of affect on character, appearance, integrity and setting of listed farm buildings

Natural England

Natural England believe at this point in time the survey information provided (from Encompass Ecology Ltd.) is insufficient to establish the effect the proposal may have on bats, and as such

we have no option but to object to the application at this stage. We would like to see the results of the recommended emergence survey along with a detailed mitigation strategy before a decision is made. If this further information is submitted then Natural England will be happy to make comment.

Environmental Health

No objections

TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL

Approve

Subject to public access being provided on land opposite the site to enable a footway from the B3177 to Alfington Church and Village Hall to be created. Members commended the design of the dwellings as shown in the drawings and considered them to be an asset to the overall character and ambience of the village.

WARD MEMBER(S)

None Received

REPRESENTATIONS

Objections

1 letter has been received raising the following points:

- Lack of facilities and services in Alfington for increase in population
- Increase in traffic

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

App.No:	Proposal	Decision	Date
07/2824/FUL	Conversion of agricultural buildings to nine dwellings comprising alterations/extension and construction of new vehicular access and parking	Refused	05.03.2008
93/P1554	Extension of Cubicle House	Approved	08.11.1993
92/P1848	Demolish cottage at farm	Refused	19.03.1993
79/C0746	House and garage	Approved	16.08.1979
78/C1416	House or Bungalow and garage	Approved	12.12.1978

PLANNING POLICIES

Government Guidance

Planning Policy Statement 3 - Housing
Planning Policy Statement 7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West

Devon County Structure Plan (2001-2016)

Policy ST1 – Sustainable Development
Policy ST16 – Local Centres and Rural Areas
Policy C06 – Quality of New Development
Policy C07 – Historic Settlements and Buildings
Policy C010 – Protection of Nature Conservation Sites and Species
Policy CO11 – Conserving Energy Resources
Policy TR2 – Co-ordination of Land-Use/Travel Planning
Policy TR5 – Hierarchy of Modes

East Devon Local Plan (1995-2011)

Policy S5 – Countryside Protection
Policy D1 – Design and Local Distinctiveness
Policy D2 – Sustainable Construction
Policy D10 – Re-Use of Rural Buildings Outside Settlements
Policy EN6 – Wildlife Habitats and Features
Policy EN9 – Extension, Alteration or Change of use of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest
Policy EN19 - Private Sewerage Treatment Systems
Policy RE3 – Open Space Provision in New Housing Developments
Policy TA1 – Accessibility of New Development
Policy TA7 – Adequacy of Road Network and Site Access
Policy TA9 – Parking Provision in New Development

SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The site is located in the open countryside just outside the village of Alfington to the north of Ottery St Mary. Alfington is a very small village consisting of a collection of farms and a limited number of residential properties. The site is set back from the road to the rear of Alfington Farm a collection of farm buildings in various states of repair laid out in a courtyard.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposal is to convert some of the existing buildings into four dwellings with parking area and new access. A habitats survey has been submitted with the application along with a structural survey of the existing buildings, a flood risk assessment and foul drainage information.

CONSIDERATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

Background

This is a resubmission following a previous refusal 07/2824/FUL for the conversion of barns at Alfington Farm to dwellings.

The farmhouse at Alfington Farm is grade II listed. The barns to the rear are therefore considered to be curtilage listed.

Whilst the scheme has been altered somewhat from the previous proposal and numbers reduced from the provision of nine units of accommodation to four there are still fundamental objections with the proposal in a similar vein to the previous scheme.

This application is being brought before the committee as the Parish Council recommend approval subject to the applicant providing a public footpath between the B3177 to Alfington Church. On the previous application the Parish Council raised objection on the grounds that the buildings were not considered to be structurally sound or worthy of retention.

Structural Survey

A structural survey submitted with the application is the same as previously submitted. Unfortunately in designing the conversion scheme it appears that no reference has been made to the detail contained in the structural report.

Policy D10 of the adopted East Devon Local Plan on the Re-Use of Rural Buildings Outside Settlements requires that buildings must be structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial reconstruction or alteration and the buildings must also be of some architectural or historic merit worthy of retention.

The buildings are considered to be curtilage listed. Whilst this can strengthen the argument that some of the buildings may be worthy of retention the structural survey and comments from the conservation officer confirm that the buildings which are worthy of retention for their architectural and historic merit are not actually capable of conversion. This gives an in principle objection to the proposal in that in order to complete the development as proposed the buildings of any merit would be lost through demolition and reconstruction thereby losing their intrinsic value.

Barn D is of cob construction clearly collapsed and the structural survey confirms that this would need to be rebuilt. The proposal includes the construction of a single storey building on the site of the collapsed barn. This requires substantial reconstruction and is therefore tantamount to the creation of a dwelling in the open countryside.

Barn C is brick and blockwork with asbestos roof in part. This is not considered to be a building of sufficient architectural or historic merit to warrant retention of this building. The building however has been included in the proposal to be used as garaging.

In this respect the current proposal is felt to be worse than the previous scheme in that the buildings and features of any merit are to be lost as a result whilst retaining a blockwork built barn C which has no merit.

Design and Appearance

Features such as the archway through to the courtyard from the farmhouse between Barn G and Barn C are to be bricked up and therefore lost. In addition the archway on Barn E which is stated in the structural survey would need reconstruction and has therefore been omitted from the proposed elevations. It would appear that the buildings of any architectural or historic merit are not structurally capable of conversion therefore are looking to be demolished. Some of the buildings i.e. Barn D are then proposed to be rebuilt and any features left in the remaining building of any merit are to be lost in the conversion works.

No consideration has been given to the design of the proposed buildings or respect for their rural character. If a conversion proposal is to be acceptable it should retain the existing character of the buildings. Domestic additions such as chimneys, porches and conservatories detract from the character and appearance of a barn and the creation of new openings should be kept to a minimum. The proposal includes the addition of many openings and the blocking up of existing ones as well as the addition of a conservatory on Unit 3.

Economic Use

The preference of Policy D10 is for an economic use of the building. The supporting statement submitted with the application merely states

“the extensive floor space of the buildings if converted to commercial use, could result in an extensive use with a high number of employees and visitors. The proximity of the application site

to existing residential properties makes commercial use on this scale an unattractive proposition being likely to cause noise and traffic nuisance to existing residents.”

No details of proposed uses have been identified such as ancillary agricultural uses, community, recreation, tourist facilities, craft and B1 uses or specifically why these buildings are not suitable for these purposes. The agent states that the floorspace is too expansive. Considering that much of the proposal requires construction of new floor space this argument is not sound. Economic development is encouraged in re-using rural buildings to boost the rural economy and provide employment therefore it is understood that there would be visitors to the site but with the benefit of the buildings providing longer term income. Insufficient justification as to why these buildings are not suitable for such purposes has been provided to justify use as residential.

Highway Issues

The Highways Authority object to the application on the grounds that it is an unsustainable location. Alington is only a small village and does not have the facilities that 4 new households would require such as shopping, leisure and educational facilities if approved the proposal would therefore encourage private vehicle use. The proposed access is to block up the existing entrance through the gateway from the main farmhouse and use a road further south to gain access to the rear. This access extends beyond the settlement boundary into the open countryside. Whilst garaging is to be provided in an existing building this will help to reduce the visual impact of the vehicles the building itself is of no architectural merit to warrant its retention.

Flood Risk

A flood risk assessment was submitted with the application but this is not required as the site is not within an identified area of flood risk. The Environment Agency have therefore not commented on the proposal.

Habitat Survey

Natural England are not satisfied with the information submitted on the application relating to protected species and would want to see the result of an emergence survey. This was not identified in the previous proposal as a reason for refusal however bats and owls are protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. If minded to approve the application a condition should be added to require an emergence survey to be carried out in order to carry out any mitigation measures that may be required as a result.

Sustainable Construction

The draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West outlines proposals and targets for reduced energy consumption in development including new housing. The Devon Structure Plan requires the incorporation of energy saving features into the design of new developments and Policy D2 of the adopted East Devon Local Plan on Sustainable Construction seeks the inclusion of energy saving measures, on site renewable energy or heat production and water saving devices. The Code for Sustainable Homes was published by government in December 2006. The Code for Sustainable Homes gives a measure of the sustainability performance of a home graded from 1 – 6. It includes standards for energy and water use at each level. From 1st May 2008 the Code for Sustainable Homes becomes mandatory and all new homes will have to be rated against it. No specific detail has been submitted with the application relating to sustainable construction or the proposed rating of the building.

Public Open Space Contribution

Policy RE3 of the adopted East Devon Local Plan requires that all new dwellings contribute towards formal and informal play spaces in the locality to account for the additional demand that

an additional household would place on them. This requirement can be met through a Section 106 or Unilateral Undertaking. A draft copy of the Unilateral Undertaking has been sent to the agent but at the time of writing no signed copy has been returned.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposal is wholly unacceptable and goes against everything that the barn conversion policy seeks to achieve. The buildings of any historical merit are proposed to be demolished, new buildings are then proposed to be built thereby creating new dwellings in the open countryside. Any features of any architectural merit are to be lost in the conversion works and the design includes the addition of many new openings and erection of a conservatory which completely detracts from the rural character of the buildings. No detail has been provided relating to sustainable construction and no legal agreement received relating to the provision of a public open space contribution. In addition the new access works are also damaging to the visual character of the area.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE for the following reasons

1. The site lies within the countryside outside the established limits of Alfrington where it is the policy of the Local Planning Authority only to allow the conversion of existing buildings where the buildings are structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial extension, alteration or reconstruction. The structural survey submitted with the application confirms that the buildings will require substantial alteration and reconstruction to carry out the development as proposed. The proposal is therefore tantamount to the creation of new dwellings in the countryside and contrary to Policies S5 (Countryside Protection) and D10 (Re-Use of Rural Buildings Outside Settlements) of the adopted East Devon Local Plan 1995-2011 and advice contained in Planning Policy Statement 7.
2. The preference of Local Plan Policy is to require a business or employment generating use of rural buildings to ensure their long term maintenance and to maximise their potential to generate employment for the benefit of the local economy before residential conversion will be considered. The applicant has not provided evidence of proposed business or employment generating uses for the buildings or sufficient justification as to why such uses are not suitable. The Local Planning Authority is therefore not satisfied that every reasonable attempt has been made to secure a suitable business use for the buildings. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy D10 (Re-Use of Rural Buildings Outside Settlements) of the adopted East Devon Local Plan 1995-2011 and advice contained in Planning Policy Statement 7.
3. One of the purposes of barn conversion policy is to secure the long term maintenance of buildings of architectural and historic merit. The proposal requires substantial conversion and reconstruction works such that any historic or architectural merit that the buildings hold will be lost as a result of the development. The proposed development would therefore have a detrimental impact on the character of the buildings which are considered to be curtilage Listed and is therefore contrary to Policies EN9 (Extension, Alteration or Change of use of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest) and D10 (Re-Use of Rural Buildings Outside Settlements) of the adopted East Devon Local Plan 1995-2011 and advice contained in Planning Policy Statement 7.
4. The design of the proposed development by virtue of the additional openings and addition of a conservatory on Unit 3 will result in a development of domestic appearance to the detriment of the character and appearance of the existing buildings and at odds with the character of the surrounding countryside. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies

D1 (Design and Local Distinctiveness) and D10 (Re-Use of Rural Buildings Outside Settlement) of the adopted East Devon Local Plan 1995-2011 and advice contained in Planning Policy Statement 7.

5. The proposed development would be located where it is remote from adequate services, employment, education, public transport etc., and would therefore increase the need for travel by private vehicles contrary to Policies TR2 (Co-ordinating Land Use/Travel Planning) and TR5 (Hierarchy of Modes) of the Devon County Structure Plan 2001-2016 and Policies EN9 (Extension, Alteration or Change of use of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest), D10 (Re-Use of Rural Buildings Outside Settlements) and TA1 (Accessibility of New Development) of the adopted East Devon Local Plan 1995-2011.
6. The creation of additional dwellings on the site generates demand for additional formal and informal open space facilities in the locality. The submitted application does not include any mechanism for the provision of such services and as a result is contrary to the requirements of Policy RE3 (Open Space Provision in New Housing Developments) of the adopted East Devon Local Plan 1995-2011.

Informative Note

The applicant is advised that the buildings are curtilage listed and therefore Listed Building Consent would be required for any demolition, alteration or extension.

List of Background Papers

Application file, consultations and policy documents referred to in the report.