The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 June 2016

by Claire Searson MSc PGDip BSc (Hons) MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 12 July 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/A2525/W/16/3146580
Bridge House, Fishergate, Sutton St James, Spalding, PE12 0EZ

- 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 and Mrs Button against the decision of South Holland District Council.
- The application Ref H06-1125-15, dated 1 December 2015, was refused by notice dated 24 February 2016.
- The development proposed is replacement dwelling with associated garage and landscaping.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located in the open countryside around 1 mile away from the village of Sutton St James. The character of the area is formed by its flat, low lying lands, which allow extensive views across the agricultural landscape. Along Fishergate are a number of sporadic developments of single dwellings, which are of a variety of ages, sizes and architectural designs.

4. The appeal site is accessed from Fishergate via a private drive. It is a generous plot which is bounded along the highway by a tall close-boarded fence, providing screening. To the northern boundary of the site there is a tall conifer hedge, and to the south is a large drainage channel. To the east boundary of the site there is a tall close-boarded fence. Beyond this are a number of portable office accommodation buildings, storage containers and steel framed portal buildings to rear of the site. Within the site are a number of mature trees. The existing dwelling comprises of a 2-storey extended dwelling, dating from the 20th century which is of no great architectural merit or visual appeal.

5. Saved Policy HS17 of the South Holland Local Plan (2006) sets out a number of criteria for the replacement of dwellings in the countryside. Criterion 5 requires that the floor area of proposals should not exceed the floor area of the original dwelling by more than 20%. Criterion 7 requires the design of proposals to

reflect the design of traditional, vernacular buildings in the area, in terms of their scale, character, materials and architectural detailing.

6. The proposed replacement dwelling would be a 2-storey 4-bedroomed house comprising of a main block, with a 1 ½ storey garage block with a bedroom above. This would be attached to the main building via an elevated glazed walkway at first floor level. It would be re-sited within the plot, located at right angles to Fishergate, running alongside the southern boundary of the site, in parallel to the drainage ditch.

7. The appeal proposals would be at a significantly larger scale than the current dwelling on the site. However, it is understood that in applying Policy HS17, the Council have, in general, taken a more flexible approach in terms of proposals which exceed the 20% threshold, if the development meets criterion 7 in respect of securing high quality vernacular design. The Council consider that the proposals fall short of high quality of design required to justify this pragmatic approach.

8. I saw that there is a wide variety of architectural styles in the area and I note that the design of the proposed dwelling has been informed by a number of vernacular buildings, taking specific reference from agricultural and pumping station architecture.

9. The main body of the house would form a large single linear block, designed to emulate a large traditional threshing barn. Due to its length, this would have a strong horizontal emphasis. To the rear elevation, there would be a single storey canopy area, with a flat roof. This would be partly in-filled with timber cladding in order to accommodate a store and study area. I find that the canopy would have a domestic character and would be conspicuously different in design to the main body of the house. I find that this would give rise to an uncomfortable relationship and would dominate and jar along this elevation. Due to its length, height and flat roof design, this would also further augment the horizontal emphasis of the building.

10. The fenestration appears to have been designed to imitate windows found in pumping stations in the area. However, this effect is lost due to the great range of opening in a variety of different scales, with some full height windows, some much smaller at a more domestic scale. The projecting window box above the garage and the single length floor to ceiling windows in the gables do not appear to take reference from any vernacular design and are modern in their appearance. This mix and match approach to fenestration would appear chaotic and contrived.

11. I also consider that the garage block, with its glazed first floor link to the main house, and its modern fenestration, would bear no resemblance to the design of the rest of the dwelling. I find that this would form an incongruous feature which further confuses the overall design of the dwelling.

12. Overall, while I recognise that particular architectural tastes should not be imposed, I consider that the amalgamation of two distinct vernacular building types, along with the addition of more modern domestic design features would give rise to a confused design which would not easily legible as a modern interpretation of either a pumping station or a traditional agricultural building. The use of high quality materials such as slate, brickwork, and cast iron

rainwater goods, would not overcome my concerns in respect of the overall design.

13. Furthermore, while I accept that the proposed dwelling would be largely screened due to the vegetation cover and boundaries of the site, due to its siting alongside the drain, this would be visible in wider views, when travelling along Fishergate. Accordingly, it would fail to respond to and integrate into its surroundings and would not reinforce the local distinctiveness of the rural landscape.

14. A number of examples of replacement dwellings have been cited by the appellant's as setting a significant design and planning precedent. Based on the plans provided, the execution of the design of these dwellings appears to have adopted traditional design detailing in a more consistent form than the proposals before me, whilst also successfully incorporating modern design features. I also understand that none of these are in the vicinity of the appeal site. In any case, I have determined the appeal on its own merits.

15. There have been a number of third party representations in support of the development. However, I have found that the proposal would harm local character and this is not a matter that is, in this case, outweighed by there being some local support for it.

16. The appellant's have also drawn my attention to Policy 19 in the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan which seeks to restrict the increase in size of replacement dwellings to 40%, unless the development is of exceptional quality. However, this plan remains unexamined and un-adopted and as such, carries little weight. In any case, it is the overall design of the proposed dwelling, rather than the scale, which I have identified as causing harm and therefore, this change in policy would have no bearing on my findings.

17. I note that the appeal proposal would provide a dwelling which would better meet the needs of the household and would conform to increased standards of energy efficiency. I also note that there were no concerns in respect of flood risk, living conditions and highway safety. However, any such benefits of the proposed development would not be negated by the harm I have identified to rural character.

18. Overall I conclude that the development, by virtue of its poor design, would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. This would not accord with LP Policy HS17 in respect of the design of replacement dwellings reflecting the design of traditional vernacular buildings. This would also run counter to the general aims of the National Planning Policy Framework which seek to secure high quality design which responds to local character and integrates into the environment.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons above, taking into account all other matters raised, I dismiss the appeal.

C Searson
INSPECTOR