



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 March 2024

by Jonathan Bore MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 March 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/D0121/W/23/3326999

The Woodspring, 238 High Street, Worle, Somerset, BS22 6JJ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Litfield Land Limited against the decision of North Somerset Council.
 - The application ref is 21/P/3155/OUT.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of the public house and the erection of 10 dwellings with new access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The application was submitted in outline. It sought approval for access, layout and scale, with appearance and landscaping reserved for subsequent approval. The proposal would involve the loss of the Woodspring Public House, which is a non-designated heritage asset.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the benefit from providing 10 new homes would outweigh the loss of the heritage asset.

Reasons

4. The public house is not currently in use, and has been marketed both as a public house and as a day nursery, for which planning permission was granted in 2020. The scheme would entail its demolition, and would provide 10 new homes, including potentially one affordable home, in a district in which there is only 3.2 to 3.5 years housing supply. The development would be acceptable in respect of flood risk, as discussed below, so the decision-making balance set out in paragraph 11d of the National Planning Policy Framework applies. The layout and access would be acceptable in relation to neighbouring properties and the homes would make good use of a previously developed site in a sustainable location within the settlement boundary. In this regard the scheme would accord with Policies CS14 and CS28 of the North Somerset Core Strategy.
5. However, The Woodspring is of considerable local value as a heritage asset. Documentary evidence suggests that it was built in the first decade of the 19th Century and was then known as The New Inn. The first map evidence of the

premises, of 1831, shows The New Inn as part of a cluster of buildings. The public house later hosted social events, committee meetings and auctions, and externally it had a covered skittle alley, orchard and gardens. In the Second World War it was used as a depot for gas mask fittings.

6. Externally The Woodspring's distinctive position at a slight angle to the present-day High Street, its scale, its long two storey form, and its pantile roofs, have changed little over the years. Its footprint corresponds with its depiction on every map since 1831, so despite the alterations which have removed much of its internal character, a significant part of its structural fabric is likely to be of some age. Despite extensive re-rendering, its front elevation, its roof profile and the shape, proportion and style of nearly all its front window openings, with their small keystones and wooden frames, remain much the same as those shown in photographs of 1907 and 1924. To the rear, an outbuilding of around 1840 has survived.
7. The Woodspring is a landmark in Worle because it is a perceptibly older building in a prominent position on the corner of High Street and Station Road and it makes a significant contribution to the sense of place. It represents long term continuity on this site and is surviving physical evidence of the settlement's earlier built form. It contributes towards an understanding of the development of Worle and anchors modern Worle to its historic origins, which is particularly important because the locality is largely dominated by much more recent buildings.
8. Whilst acknowledging that marketing exercises have been undertaken, the building in my assessment has considerable potential for re-use; it is in reasonably good order and possesses extensive indoor space, an independently accessed function room, living accommodation, parking and a garden. Its loss as a community facility would conflict with the aims of Policy CS27 of the North Somerset Core Strategy and Policy DM68 of the North Somerset Sites and Policies Plan which seek to retain such facilities.
9. The total loss of the heritage asset would be contrary to policies CS5 of the North Somerset Core Strategy and Policy DM7 of the North Somerset Sites and Policies Plan Part 1. Preservation by record, including interpretation boards, as suggested by the appellant, would not compensate adequately for the physical loss of the building. The harm to the historic environment, to the townscape and to local community facilities and history that would ensue from the loss of the building would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits from the proposed new homes.

Other matters

10. The site is in Flood Risk Zone 3a, but the Council accept that the scheme would pass the sequential test. As regards the exception test, the development would be designed with finished floor levels that would allow for safe internal refuge in the event of an extreme flood event. Having regard to all the evidence I consider that it would be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users. There would be wider sustainability benefits, including the provision of new homes with a high level of energy efficiency. However, any benefit in this regard would be outweighed by the total loss of the heritage asset.

11. As regards affordable housing, the viability assessment and unilateral obligation are noted, but the proposed contribution towards the provision of an affordable home does not outweigh the objections to the loss of the heritage asset.

Conclusion

12. I have considered the appeal decisions submitted by the parties, but each case must be considered on its own merits. I have taken into account all the other matters raised but they do not alter the balance of my conclusions. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Jonathan Bore

INSPECTOR

