

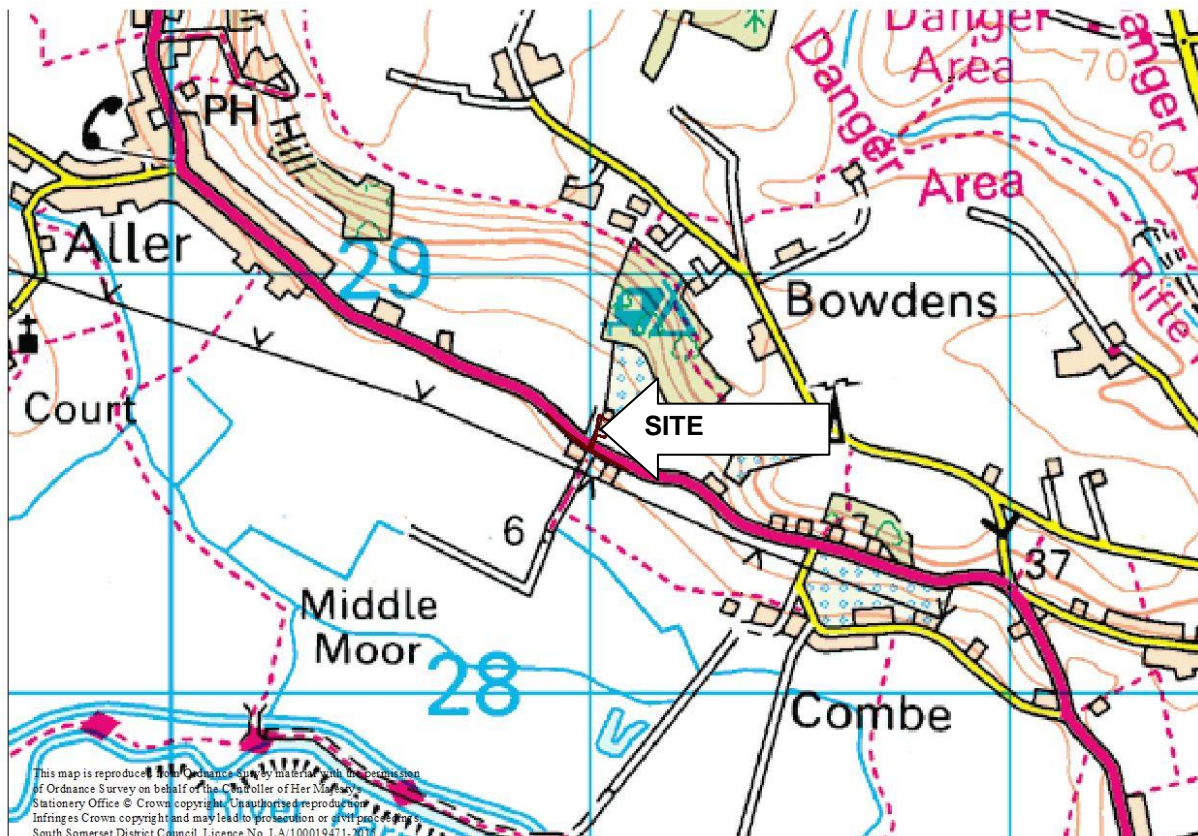
Officer Report On Planning Application: 15/00858/FUL

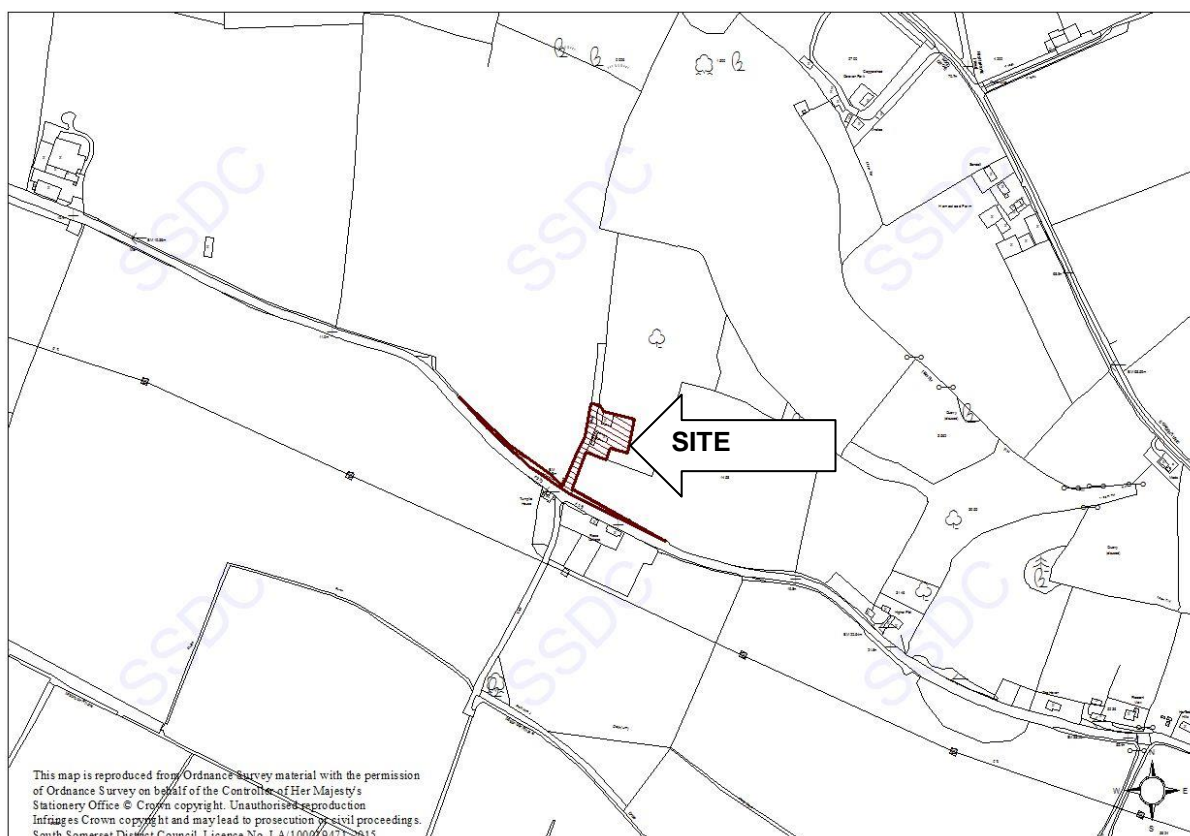
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| Proposal : | Demolition of buildings and the erection of 1 No. dwelling. (GR 341036/128638) |
| Site Address: | Land Opposite Turnpike House, Aller Road, Aller. |
| Parish: | Aller |
| TURN HILL Ward (SSDC Member) | Cllr S Pledger |
| Recommending Case Officer: | John Millar Tel: (01935) 462465 Email: john.millar@southsomerset.gov.uk |
| Target date : | 24th April 2015 |
| Applicant : | Mr & Mrs P Knight |
| Agent: (no agent if blank) | Mr Dathan Trent, Lake View, The Maltings, Charlton Estate, Shepton Mallet BA4 5QE |
| Application Type : | Minor Dwellings 1-9 site less than 1ha |

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

This application is referred to committee as a result of the applicant's relationship to the Ward Member, with the agreement of the Vice Chairman, and also to enable the issues raised to be fully debated by Members.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL





The site comprises two single storey, dilapidated agricultural buildings and a metal container, located off a track a little over 50m to the north of the A372. The site is located in open countryside, approximately 800m to the east of the developed edge of Aller. There are two dwellings on the south side of the A372, opposite the site, one of which is a grade II listed building, otherwise this is an isolated location with limited development presence. The buildings adjoin an existing orchard to the north east, with open fields to the south, west and east. The site is also in close proximity to Bowden Woodland, designated as Ancient Woodland. It is also close to Aller Hill SSSI and Caravan Park Wood County Wildlife Site.

HISTORY

24906: Use of land as a site for a caravan - Approved for the period 27/8/1954 until 31/3/1957.

24906a: Continued use of land as a site for a caravan - Approved for the period 18/8/1957 until 31/3/1960.

POLICY

The South Somerset Local Plan (2006 - 2028) was adopted on the 5th March 2015. In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), the adopted local plan now forms part of the development plan. As such, decisions on the award of planning permission should be made in accordance with this development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Legislation and national policy are clear that the starting point for decision-making is the development plan, where development that accords with an up-to-date local plan should be approved, and proposed development that conflicts

should be refused, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

Policies of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006-2028)

SD1 - Sustainable Development

SS1 - Settlement Strategy

SS2 - Development in Rural Settlements

EQ2 - General Development

EQ4 - Biodiversity

TA5 - Transport Impact of New Development

National Planning Policy Framework

Core Planning Principles - Paragraph 17

Chapter 4 - Promoting Sustainable Transport

Chapter 6 - Delivering a Wide Choice of High Quality Homes

Chapter 7 - Requiring Good Design

Chapter 11 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

National Planning Practice Guidance

Design

Natural Environment

Rural Housing

Policy-related Material Considerations

Somerset County Council Parking Strategy (September 2013)

Somerset County Council Highways Development Control - Standing Advice (June 2015)

CONSULTATIONS

Parish Council: Aller Parish Council met and discussed this application. The conversion of agricultural buildings to a residence was unanimously supported. They particularly endorsed the recommendation of bird boxes and out of season development suggestion. It was helpful to have the immediate neighbours to the site attend our meeting and hear that they to support the proposal.

SCC Highway Authority: The site lies on Aller Road, a section of the A372 that links Langport with Bridgwater. The national speed limit of 60 mph applies past the site and vehicle speeds are likely to be around this level since the road is open, wide and straight.

There is no obstacle to visibility to the west for emerging vehicles and the necessary splays can be achieved. To the east there is a fence which forms the field boundary but there are plans to alter the layout of the field gate and the fence and this will help to improve visibility. The improvement in visibility proposed outweighs the additional conflicting movements created by the single dwelling proposed compared to the agricultural movements with the existing use.

There will be sufficient parking on site and it will be possible for vehicles to enter and leave the site forward gear which is acceptable. Part of the access is currently hard surfaced over the first 6 metres and this consolidation should be extended to cover the whole of the access to prevent loose material being carried on to the highway.

As a result, the Highway Authority raises no objection to this application subject to the imposition of relevant conditions regarding the surfacing of the access, retention of parking and turning facilities and visibility.

SSDC Highway Consultant: Sustainability issue given location of site distant from Aller and

Langport - no footways, lighting, etc. If existing use of buildings generate a comparable level of traffic as the proposed residential use then proposal may be acceptable in traffic generation terms. Securing appropriate visibility splays commensurate with vehicle speeds would be required.

Natural England: No objections in respect to the nearby SSSI.

SSDC Ecologist: No comments nor recommendations to make.

SSDC Landscape Architect: The application site lays outside and to the west of Aller village, and is unrelated to the hamlets of Combe and Wearne to the east, to thus be in a countryside location. It lays within an agricultural landscape characterised by a mix of arable and pasture fields, with a backdrop of woodland over rising ground. The site singularly resides circa 60 metres back from the road network, and is accessed by an unobtrusive farm track. There is little built form in the local vicinity, other than a sporadic scattering of dwellings that are threaded along and front onto the A372 to the south. These elements represent the general rural setting within which the application site resides.

With this proposal, the proposed house and its associated curtilage would present a clear domestic incursion into the countryside. Whilst a low-level of built-form is present on this site, there is a marked difference between an agricultural form which generates occasional agricultural use, and a new dwelling in a non-residential environment, which introduces the incongruous characteristics of night-lighting; domestic vehicular activity and parking space; and the appearance of domestic paraphernalia within the red-line curtilage of the application, where again there is an erosion of the agricultural landscape due to garden use. Additionally, an individual dwelling set back from the local road network and outside a local settlement context is contrary to local character, and impacts upon the countryside, which the NPPF seeks to conserve. Consequently I consider the proposal to fail to preserve and enhance the character of the local environment as is required by LP policy EQ2.

I should add that the planting proposed by the landscape notes associated with the house plan is unacceptable. The ecology report states a need for indigenous hedging, but the proposal is for a random mix of non-indigenous shrubs which are entirely inappropriate in this rural context. Should this proposal go forward, it will be essential that the correct species are selected.

REPRESENTATIONS

Four letters of support have been received from local residents, make the following points:

- The proposal would be an improvement on the existing derelict buildings, enhancing the visual aspect.
- This is a good location for a new dwelling and would bring another family to the village, adding to the local community.

CONSIDERATIONS

The main considerations concern the principle of development, impact on the character and appearance of the area and highway safety.

Principle of Development

The application site is located in open countryside to the east of the settlement of Aller. It is approximately 800m from the developed edge of Aller, being separated by undeveloped agricultural land. The site is also located off the A372, which is a 60mph classified road with no pedestrian footpath or lighting..

In policy context, national guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development, advising that "local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances." Paragraph 49 of the NPPF also states housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as does policy SD1 of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006-2028).

Policy SS1 (Settlement Strategy) highlights the areas where new development is expected to be focused, grouping certain towns and villages into a hierarchy, of settlements including the Strategically Significant Town (Yeovil), Primary Market Towns, Local Market Towns and Rural Centres. All other settlements are 'Rural Settlements', which policy SS1 states "will be considered as part of the countryside to which national countryside protection policies apply (subject to the exceptions identified in policy SS2. Policy SS2 states:

"Development in Rural Settlements (not Market Towns or Rural Centres) will be strictly controlled and limited to that which:

- Provides employment opportunities appropriate to the scale of the settlement; and/or
- Creates or enhances community facilities and services to serve the settlement; and/or
- Meets identified housing need, particularly for affordable housing.

Development will be permitted where it is commensurate with the scale and character of the settlement, provides for one or more of the types of development above, and increases the sustainability of a settlement in general. Proposals should be consistent with relevant community led plans, and should generally have the support of the local community following robust engagement and consultation. Proposals for housing development should only be permitted in Rural Settlements that have access to two or more key services listed at paragraph 5.41 (i.e. local convenience shop, post office, pub, children's play area/sports pitch, village hall/community centre, health centre, faith facility, primary school)."

The applicant seeks to justify the proposal by stating that the site is well related to the nearby settlement Aller and that the proposal will help to assist in the provision of dwellings to meet the Local Plan period requirement. It is further suggested that this will be an appropriate brownfield development that will seek to enhance the site by the replacement of the existing dilapidated buildings.

In respect to satisfying Local Plan policy SS2, no appropriate justification has been put forward by the applicant for the proposed residential development. Even though it is noted that the Parish Council have not objected to the application and letters of support have been received, the proposal fails to be justified by an identified **local need** that would meet the requirements of Local Plan policy SS2. In addition to no appropriate justification having been put forward, there is no neighbourhood plan, housing needs survey, or any other formal document identified to support the proposal. It must therefore be concluded that the proposal fails to satisfy policy SS2 of the Local Plan as it does not provide employment opportunities, enhance community facilities and services to serve the development, or meet an identified housing need, particularly for affordable housing.

Notwithstanding the failure to meet an identified local need, it is also felt that the site is poorly related to the nearest rural settlement of Aller. The site is not considered to be an acceptable

location for new residential development in principle, due to its open countryside location and the level of separation from the Aller. Furthermore, there are no pedestrian links to the village with no roadside footpaths and no lighting. It is also noted that the main road is a busy classified 'A' road (A372), which reduces the likelihood of pedestrian access to local services on safety grounds.

Scale and Appearance

Policy EQ2 states that "development will be designed to achieve a high quality, which promotes South Somerset's local distinctiveness and preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the district. Furthermore, development proposals...will be considered against (among other things):

- Conserving and enhancing the landscape character of the area
- Reinforcing local distinctiveness and respect local context
- Local area character
- Site specific considerations

In this case, the application site is located within open countryside with no clear relationship to Aller or any other nearby settlements. The site is approximately 750m from the developed edge of Aller, however it is clearly divorced from the settlement by sparsely developed open countryside.

The applicant has sought to justify the proposal on the basis of replacement of dilapidated buildings on site, however these buildings are simple low profile structures, comprising small-scale built form with limited footprint. Despite their dilapidated state, they are considered to have minimal impact, respecting the rural context of this generally undeveloped area of open countryside. There may be some benefits in removing them, however they are not considered to have an overly negative impact on the local area due to their discreet nature and limited presence in the local landscape. The replacement with a new build dwelling, even a well-designed one such as this, is not considered to outweigh the harm that will be caused by the increased built presence, associated improvements to the access at the junction of the track and the A372, and the increased domestication of the site as a result of additional night lighting, domestic vehicular activity and parking, erosion of existing open countryside for the proposed garden area, and the likely introduction of associated garden paraphernalia. As such, the proposed development is recommended for refusal.

As mentioned above, the proposed property has been well-designed so there are no fundamental issues with this side of the proposal, however the principle of development in this location is objected to on both planning policy grounds and adverse impact on local landscape character.

Further consideration has also been given to the impact on a nearby listed building, Turnpike House, to the south. Having considered the distance between the listed building and the application site and the design of the proposed building, it is not considered that the proposal will have an adverse effect on the setting of this local heritage asset.

Highway Safety

The proposed development is to be served from an existing agricultural access that leads to the existing buildings and onto land beyond, which is in separate ownership. There is current visibility to the west of the existing access of over 160m, which is in line with Highway Authority requirements and improvements are proposed to the east to provide visibility of up to 110m. While this is short of the required distance, the applicant cites the improvement to the existing

arrangements and advises that the agricultural use of the site could be used by larger slow moving vehicles.

The County Council Highway Authority have considered the application and have raised no objections. They note the reduced visibility but confirm that the improvements to the access outweighs potential additional vehicle movements. It is noted that a properly consolidated access is required, however this could be conditioned along with other matters such as the provision of the required visibility. The proposal also makes provision for parking spaces and appropriate turning facilities, which will also need to be subject to a condition to be kept free of obstruction and available for parking and turning. Overall, the proposal is not considered to have any detrimental impact on highway safety.

Residential Amenity

The proposed development is located at sufficient distance from any other nearby property to avoid any unacceptable impact on residential amenity

Other Issues

An ecological survey has been submitted in support of the application, which concludes that the building is unlikely to be suitable for roosting bats, although it is likely to support nesting birds. It is concluded that provision should be made for nesting birds, such as new bird boxes and new planting, and that vegetation removal works and demolition should not take place during the nesting season. The Council's Ecologist has considered the report and has no objections.

The site is also near to Aller Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Bowden Woodland, designated as Ancient Woodland and Caravan Park Wood County Wildlife Site. It is not however considered that the proposed development would have any adverse impact on these national and locally important sites.

Overall, it is not considered that the proposal would have any adverse impact on local ecology.

Conclusion

The site is poorly related to key local services, by virtue of distance to these services, and the development fails to provide for an essential need. It is also considered that the associated intrusion into open countryside and failure to respect local character makes the scheme unacceptable. The development proposal is therefore considered to be unacceptable and fails to meet the aims of sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse permission

FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

01. The proposal would represent new residential development in open countryside, for which an overriding essential need has not been justified. The application site is also remote from local services and therefore constitutes unsustainable development that is

contrary to policies SD1, SS1 and SS2 of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006-2028) and to the aims and objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework.

02. The proposed development by reason of its form, scale and siting within open countryside, represents an incongruous form of development that fails to preserve the distinctive character and quality of the local landscape. As such, it has an unacceptable impact on the character, appearance and the rural context of the locality. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy EQ2 of the South Somerset Local Plan (2006-28) and provisions of chapters 7, 11 and the core planning principles of the National Planning Policy Framework.
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