

19 February 2015

**RE: Proposed Passivhaus, Ballenden, Rossendale.
Rossendale Council Planning Application No: 2015/0025
Observations on Post Appeal re- application.**

Background

In the pre-Application phase of Karen & Eric Howard's proposal for a Passivhaus as a rural live-work development, Places Matter! (PM!) were supportive of the aspiration of the applicants and their architect and felt that the proposal could be deemed to satisfactorily fulfil the relevant check-list criteria for a 'Paragraph 55 House'. PM! also found the applicants and their architect to be responsive to suggestions and accepting of constructive criticism.

The applicants have resubmitted a revised scheme and have asked for observations from PM!

Observations

In supporting this application, we believe there are opportunities to address the Inspector's concerns and are confident that the applicants will be receptive to further develop the scheme in consultation with the Authority.

We have also been impressed by the Applicant's evident enthusiasm for, and practice of a sustainable rural lifestyle. We are prepared to accept that this proposal is a natural development of the desire to progress their 'experiment' in sustainable living in the country.

Para 55 checklist

As the application is for consideration as a Para 55 exception, we would like to respond to the current proposals utilising the appropriate checklist:

—be truly outstanding or innovative, helping to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas;

We understand the Inspector had no issues with this consideration, but we would like to reconsider the design merits of the proposal and its innovative offer.

The arrangement of the living space, contained in a simple well proportioned, cedar clad box, floats on a random stone base which contains the utility spaces, work room and bedrooms. This is a classic format, but is simply handled and is intelligently applied to this location.

The building manages its bulk well in relation to the scale and form of neighbouring buildings. Rather than a 'grand' Para 55 mansion, this property can be a discrete, good-neighbourly detached house in the close confines of Lomas Lane.

The planning of the building lends it to adaptation to suit the changing demands of the occupants, as the family develops and as ageing in a rural location imposes new demands. The house can, for instance be easily adapted to provide for independent living in old age as well as accommodating a separate household of carers.

As a type commonly found in rural locations this development can set new standards for modest detached homes in the countryside, regardless of the additional merits, in this instance, of bringing live-work economic activity to the area.

The pragmatic approach to Passivhaus rules could produce a sustainable house which is deliverable by craft building techniques and applicable to future self-builders.

—reflect the highest standards in architecture;

The revised scheme largely follows the previous arrangement, but has been significantly reduced in height and in overall area. We understand the principles of the design and layout were not an issue for the inspector.

—significantly enhance its immediate setting

The field walls, fences and hedgerows, along Lomas Lane together with the poor repair of the road surface and low level of cultivation of the adjacent fields combine to a generally unprepossessing aspect. In this context the introduction of a new property with high design aspiration could do much to raise the stock of the immediate neighbourhood.

The applicants have put forward landscape proposals which include substantial and strategic tree planting, both of native species and of orchard trees. While planting will not produce instant effect, it seems justifiable to consider the maturing setting, as was the case in the best traditions of English country house design.

—be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

The Inspector was content with the 'materiality' and form of the scheme.

In response to concerns regarding the 'prominence' of the house, we note that the overall height and footprint of the building have been significantly reduced. Whether the applicants could consider further adjustment to the location might be a matter for further negotiation?

We believe it is also valid to consider the development of the setting over a period of time. The landscape proposals as they mature over the next 5 to 10 years will significantly modify the immediate impact of the building, containing the new building in shelter belts typical of the immediate vicinity.

Conclusion

PM! recognises that it is essential for planning authorities to exercise caution and to stringently police policy provisions, but also believe society is beholden to encourage excellence and innovation. We believe both considerations can be achieved in exceptional circumstances by encouraging individual householders with enthusiasm and determination to produce outstanding developments. Subject to close compliance we believe this to be the intention and spirit of the exclusions of NPPF Paragraph 55.

Yours sincerely



Charlotte Myhrum
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