West Harptree Parish Council

Planning Report 15th May 2023

New Application

Reference **23/01390/FUL**

Address **Parcel 0956, Harptree Hill, West Harptree, Bristol**

Proposal **Erection of a new, detached dwelling house with associated landscaping and new vehicular access from Harptree Hill.**

Background

Mr & Mrs Rob & Janette Billington purchased Fairash House in October 2020 including a narrow strip of land to the south of the house and to the East of Harptree Hill, overall around 2.5 acres.

Working with BPB Architect Ltd, they have already extended and modified Fairash House and on their behalf this same architectural practice has now applied for consent for a substantial four-bedroom house in the triangular site at the south of their land, between Cowleaze Lane & Harptree Hill

Proposal









Key issues

1. The development lies outside the development boundary of the village and in a conspicuous position within the Mendip Hills AONB, commanding an extensive view over the valley and therefore very prominent from the valley.
2. It is a somewhat radical design that bears little reference to local character and is clad in an incongruous mixture of random rubble masonry, clay (roman) tile, vertical timber cladding, glass and corten steel (*literally, rusty steel sheet….*).
3. The Pre Application Advice Report for this site apparently noted that, "*Any dwelling to the proposed site will need to be of truly outstanding design, reflecting the highest standards in architecture*". This is evidently a reference to Paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which states;

   80. Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

   a) there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;

   b) the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;

   c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting ***(NB This provision was used as the basis for the application for consent for development of the Fairash Barns)****;*

   d) the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential building; or

   e) ***the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:***

   - is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and

   - would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

   (NB This provision was used as the basis for the two recent planning applications for the site at South Widcombe, both refused, AKA "the spaceships".)
4. If planning consent were to be granted for this development on the basis of Para 80 (e), it would set an extremely dangerous precedent for more *isolated homes in the countryside* elsewhere in the Valley and / or AONB and maybe even a "*Spaceship version 3.0*" at South Widcombe. It is therefore suggested that there are two strong reasons for the Parish Council to object;
   a. the radical design; and
   b. the damaging local precedent that planning consent would set.
5. While it is evident that BPB Architect Ltd has put in a massive amount of work on the project already, it is at the same time apparent;
   a. that they are only a small local practice,
   b. that they are not experienced in making "Para 80" applications; and
   c. that the proposals are open to some fairly significant challenges in terms of various unfounded and inappropriate claims and the overall design quality.
6. 12 people have objected to the application while three people have written in support. Highways and Landscape departments have both objected.
7. I have contacted the Mendip Hills AONB Planning Officer who should be sending over their response.

Proposed response

Planning Application Reference 23/01390/FUL: Parcel 0956, Harptree Hill, West Harptree.

West Harptree Parish Council strongly objects on the grounds that the proposed development breaches a number of planning policies and fails to meet the requirements of NPPF paragraph 80 (e). If planning consent were to be granted for this development, we suggest that it would set a dangerous precedent for more "*isolated homes in the countryside*" elsewhere in the Chew Valley and / or the AONB. Details of relevant planning policy considerations are set out below:

Chew Valley Neighbourhood Plan

1. **Policy HDE1 Rural Landscape Character**

   Visual charts HDE1-V1 and V2 show characteristics that reinforce countryside character within the Chew Valley Neighbourhood Plan area.

   Using these charts as reference, it is evident that the proposed development fails to reflect conserve or enhance the local character.

2. **Policy HDE2 Settlement Build Character**

   Visual charts HDE2-V1 and 2 show characteristics that reinforce settlement character within the Chew Valley Neighbourhood Plan area.

   Using these charts as reference, it is evident that the proposed development fails to reflect conserve or enhance the local character.

3. **Policy HDE3 Important Views**

   Chart HDE3-V2 (Sensitivity to Views) evidences that the site is in *"Slopes easily seen from the wider landscape. These form the skyline and backdrop to views."* Furthermore, Chart HDE3-V1f (Important Long Views) evidences that the site is immediately adjacent to view location B6.

   The site is in an area flagged in the Chew Valley Neighbourhood Plan as both **sensitive** and **visually prominent** and thus fails to meet the requirement.

4. **Policy HDE13 Green Corridors & Biodiversity**

   The site lies within a significant green corridor on the South side of the valley and change of use from agriculture to domestic garden will have an adverse impact on the integrity of the green corridor.

5. **Policy HDE15 Dark Skies Policy**

   Given the commanding position of the site overlooking the Chew Valley and the very large glazed areas, the light emanating from the proposed development at night will be both visible and obtrusive over a very wide area and will adversely impact wildlife.

B&NES Planning Policies

6. **Policy NE2: Conserving and Enhancing the Landscape and Landscape Character**

   The development fails to conserve or enhance local landscape character, landscape features and local distinctiveness and fails to conserve or enhances important views thus fails to meet the requirements

7. **Policy NE1: Development and Green Infrastructure**

   The development adversely affects the integrity and value of a designated strategic GI corridor thus fails to meet the requirements.

8. **Policy GB1: Visual amenities of the Green Belt**

The development is both within and conspicuous from the Green Belt and prejudices the visual amenities of the Green Belt by reason of its siting, design and materials used for its construction.

9. Policy CP7: Green Infrastructure

The integrity, multi-functionality, quality and connectivity of the strategic Green Infrastructure (GI) network in Diagram 20 will be adversely impacted.

10. Policy CP8: Green Belt

The openness of the Green Belt will be adversely impacted, contrary to national planning policy.

11. Policy ST7: Transport Requirements for Managing Development

Highway safety would be prejudiced. The retention of the existing hedge between the site and Harptree Hill is stated to be an essential part of the scheme, however this creates a major accident risk.

- There are no clear sightlines at the entrance to the site with the inevitable risk of accidents to cars and the many cyclists that use the hill.
- It will be dangerous for B&NES waste and recycling vehicles to stop on a busy and narrow hill without the ability to pull off the road.
- Construction traffic will similarly be unable to pull off the road, creating risk of accident and injury during building works.

National Planning Policy Framework

12. Paragraphs 176 and 177

These paragraphs stress that great weight should be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and that development in these nationally designated areas will be refused except in exceptional circumstances and clearly no such circumstances apply in this case.

13. Paragraph 80

This paragraph states that planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of five circumstances apply. Limbs a), b), c) and d) clearly do not apply in this case, leaving only limb e):

e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:

- is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and

- would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

We do not consider that the Para 80 (e) tests have been met and evidence this by reference to many problematic claims made in the Design and Access Statement:

Applicant's claims	**Commentary**
The Pre Application Advice Report for this site has identified that "Any dwelling to the proposed site will need to be of truly outstanding design, reflecting the highest standards in architecture".	The applicant has failed to provide any objective evidence of quality of design such as a review by an independent design panel. The architectural practice can show no design awards or other external recognition of design quality.
The … dwelling is arranged as a series of buildings on the site to replicate a typical group of farmhouse buildings that are common in the local area.	There is nothing in the massing of the scheme that is typical or in any way reminiscent of local farmhouse buildings.
The overall scale and massing of the proposed scheme has been kept low with the first floor	Contrary to the applicant's statement, the ridge heights of the main buildings are substantial

rooms effectively located in the roof space to give the appearance of a bungalow / typical farm building.	and nothing has been done to reduce or mitigate the visual impact.
The selected materials have all been carefully considered to ensure that the proposed dwelling is very much in keeping with the local context	The materials are an unfortunate hodgepodge and the juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary materials is jarring. There are no local references for Corten cladding, neither is it "*reminiscent of agricultural buildings*" nor does it "*reflect the red colour of local stonework*".
The use of straw bale walls adds innovation and a highly sustainable method of building that utilises local materials and labour to create a unique and highly thermal efficient property.	The plans indicate a wall thickness of some 450mm however straw bale walls would need to be some 800mm thick. We cannot find a single project where straw bale construction has been combined with random rubble masonry or corten steel cladding and do not believe either to be sound. All accredited design guides specify either flexible external render or other flexible vapour-permeable finishes such as timber rainscreen. This evidences that the proposed design would have to be very substantially changed prior to construction. It would be dangerous to grant consent to such an unbuildable development.
We believe that this proposed dwelling significantly enhances its immediate context and setting with a design that is sensitive to the characteristics of the local area but equally innovative and sustainable to create a truly remarkable piece of architecture.	This claim is the subjective opinion of the applicant's architect with no objective supporting evidence. The practice is small with no evidence of any recognition within the architectural profession for "exceptional quality of design."
The site's visibility above the A368 is greatly diminished by a strong tree line on the north-west boundary and the terminated view from the junction below. *Where views are obtained these would be seen above the hedgerow lined lanes, a foreground of hedge-rowed fields, and a backdrop of the hill rising up behind.* *The site is very hard to clearly view from a public road or footpath either in the short, middle or long distance vistas.*	We cannot agree with the three statements. The tree line is short and insubstantial. The site is visually very prominent given its elevation above the valley beneath. The site is immediately adjacent to and highly visible from Harptree Hill, Cowleaze Lane and the Limestone Link long distance footpath.
The building has been designed as a low carbon, energy efficient dwelling. *Glulam Timber Frame (reduces the use of steel and evidences sustainability)*	The building is inherently inefficient, with a very high ratio of external surface areas to the enclosed internal volume. At best, the design masks inherent energy inefficiency with applied measures and mechanical equipment. Corten steel is used extensively and is certainly not a low carbon material.

Reference: **23/01441/FUL**

Address: **The Old Bakery, The Street, West Harptree, Bristol, BS40 6EA**

Proposal: **Addition of a concentric flue chimney for a boiler system, terminating in a cowling to exit at the rear elevation of the property.**

Scope

The work is limited to the addition of one new boiler flue terminal on the rear elevation of the dwelling, as indicated on the elevation below;



Proposed response

It is suggested that no comment is necessary.

Pending Applications

Reference **23/00098/FUL**
Address **West Harptree House , Bristol Road, West Harptree, BS40 6HG**
Proposal **Erection of new 2 bed detached dwelling within existing residential plot.**

WHPC Supported the application with some comments

Reference: **23/01112/AGRN**
Address **Whistley Farm , Whistley Lane, West Harptree, Bristol, BS40 6HD**
Proposal **Erection of steel framed building to cover yard**

The web site notes that nobody can comment on an application for Permitted Development.

Reference: **23/00759/FUL**
Address: **Easton, Bristol Road, West Harptree, BS40 6HQ**
Proposal: **Erection of car port following the demolition of garage.**

Permission has been granted

New Local Plan

Nothing to report