

Application No: 19/0313M

Location: QUARRY BANK MILL, QUARRY BANK ROAD, STYAL, CHESHIRE, SK9 4LA

Proposal: Replacement of existing temporary cafe with a permanent cafe building.

Applicant: Mrs Phyllis Bayley, National Trust

Expiry Date: 18-Mar-2019

SUMMARY

The proposal is considered to be an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt, which reduce openness and encroaches into the countryside. The identified harm to significance of the heritage assets is considered to amount to less than substantial harm, and should therefore be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

There are considerations in favour of the proposal, including the identified public benefits are considered to clearly outweigh the less than substantial harm to the Styal Conservation Area, and the walled garden.

The only long term options for the site are the current proposal or the use of the Gardener's Cottage. The viability of the Gardener's Cottage has proven to be difficult for the applicant as the cellular layout and domestic scale of the rooms does not offer suitable accommodation for the requirements of a café, has limited accessibility and the position of the Cottage does not work well with the visitors routes that are established on the site. The Gardener's Cottage is part of the history of the site and the National Trust are also considering altering the Cottage to restore it to its original form, which will involve removal of a later extension which intrudes into the walled garden. This would make its use as a café even less viable. Accessibility to the cottage is also a limiting factor for its use as a café.

It is therefore accepted that the only long-term viable option for a café in the Upper Garden area is the current proposal. The considerations set out above in terms of the popularity of the facility amongst visitors, its ability to help to distribute visitors throughout the site, its convenient location as a stepping stone to wider parts of the site, and the absence of any viable alternative, are considered to clearly outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt and do amount to very special circumstances.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Approve subject to conditions

REASON FOR REPORT

The application has been referred to the Committee by the Head of Planning Regulation due to the particular circumstances of the application.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site comprises parts of the Quarry Bank Mill and Styal Estate. The whole of this estate covers an area of 172 hectares along the valley of the River Bollin, at the heart of which lies the Cotton Mill surrounded by other elements of this early industrial site. These other elements include the Mill Owner's house (Quarry Bank House), the Mill Manager's House, the Apprentice House and an entire worker's village as well as the agricultural land, a farmstead, allotments, walled garden, and picturesque gardens and woodland which complemented and helped to sustain this early industrial community.

A number of the buildings across the site are listed and the site is located within the Styal Conservation Area, the Green Belt and an Area of Special County Value as identified in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission to erect a permanent café building on the site of an existing temporary café building.

The temporary café building has permission until February 2020, at which point it is required to be removed from the site.

RELEVANT HISTORY

There is a range of planning history across the site, but the most relevant to the current proposal is:

14/3242M - Upper Garden: Redevelopment of the Upper Garden, including the restoration of the historic glasshouse and back sheds, including provision of an ancillary retail offer within one of the restored back sheds, the temporary provision of a structure for catering and landscape restoration works. Construction of a new Gardener's Building and compound. Quarry Bank House: Change of use of Quarry Bank House from C3 (Dwellinghouse) to D2 (Assembly & Leisure). Styal Village Properties: Change of use and Listed Building Consent for 13 Oak Cottages from C3 (Dwellinghouse) to D2 (Assembly and Leisure) and conversion and adaptation of existing Collection Store to use as an interpretation facility. Northern Woods: Restoration of paths and bridges including the removal of modern paths. Car Park: Reconfiguration and extension of the existing car park, with associated landscaping works. Welcome Building: Provision of a new single storey visitor welcome building – Approved 07.02.2015

POLICIES

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2017

MP1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
PG2 – Settlement Hierarchy
PG3 – Green Belt
SD1 – Sustainable Development in Cheshire East
SD2 – Sustainable Development Principles
EG4 - Tourism
SC1 – Leisure and Recreation
SE1 – Design
SE2 – Efficient Use of Land
SE3 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity
SE4 – The Landscape
SE5 – Trees, Hedgerow and Woodland
SE7 – The Historic Environment
SE9 – Energy Efficient Development
SE12 – Pollution, Land Contamination and Land Instability
SE13 – Flood Risk and Water Management
CO1 – Sustainable Travel and Transport

Macclesfield Borough Local Plan Policy 2004

NE1 Areas of Special County Value
NE5 Parkland Landscapes
NE11 Nature Conservation
BE15 Listed Buildings
BE24 Archaeology
GC1 Green Belt New Buildings
DC3 Amenity
DC6 Circulation and Access
DC8 Landscaping
DC9 Tree Protection
DC54 Restaurants, Cafes, Takeaways

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework)
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Styal Neighbourhood Plan

The Styal Neighbourhood Plan has reached Regulation 7 (Neighbourhood Area Designation) stage. No draft plan or policies are currently available; therefore no weight can be afforded to it.

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Manchester Airport – No objections subject to an informative relating to the use of cranes.

Environment Agency – No comments received

Historic England – Do not offer any comments. Recommend the views of the Council's specialist conservation and archaeological advisors are sought.

Cheshire Gardens Trust – Support the proposal, noting:

- Preferable to retain café in present position, which does not encroach on the walled garden
- Although larger than temporary structure, design in interesting and suitably discreet, being no higher than walls of walled garden
- Orchard theme with suitable planting of trees would certainly be of benefit and historical value. Request that consideration is given to permeability of paving, limiting surface water run-off.

Environmental Health – No comments received

Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service – No objection

Styal Parish Council – In positive support of this application

REPRESENTATIONS

None received

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Heritage Assets

The main heritage issue is the impact of the proposals upon the significance of the Styal Conservation Area (designated heritage asset) and the Upper Garden, including walled garden and vinery (non-designated heritage asset).

The Upper Garden sits on high ground above the River Bollin. It was originally the kitchen garden for the Greg family (the Mill owners) and was being established in advance of Quarry Bank House (the Mill owner's house), ready for its occupation by the Gregs. It developed over time and also became an outlet for the horticultural pursuits of a number of members of the Greg family. Its ownership changed in the twentieth century and much of its historic features were lost, including a significant portion of the glasshouse and much of its glazing and secondary structure. Recent archaeological investigations have revealed more information about the heating system within the glasshouses, illustrating the innovation and ingenuity of the Greg family. This area includes the Gardener's Cottage, the Back Sheds and the slip gardens - areas outside of the walled garden itself used for growing fruit, nuts and vegetables.

The application site is located within the area known as the slip gardens. The path network in this area has been reinstated, the footprint of the building has been designed to respect these historic paths and field boundaries evident on the 1872 Ordnance Survey map. The proposed scheme takes on a form which reflects the constraints imposed by the wall and pathways. However, whilst the historical wall and path layout is respected, the introduction of a permanent building in this former orchard area is considered to result in some harmful impact to the significance of the Upper Garden area of the managed National Trust estate which forms part of the Styal Conservation Area.

It should be noted that following the planning permission granted in 2015, the works to the Upper Garden have been completed including the restoration of the walled garden and glasshouses and works to the “back sheds” to the rear of the wall. The back sheds now include a gift shop, toilets and an interpretation / educational area. Consequently, the restored Upper Garden is now a popular destination for visitors, and the temporary café has contributed to this attraction and has been in place since the restoration works were completed.

The proposed café building is a contemporary structure to be constructed mainly with glazing and larch boarding. Importantly, it does have a low roof line which is set below the top of the walled garden. Together with the extent of glazing and the stand off from the wall, this will still allow the wall of the garden to be appreciated. Overall it is considered that the level of harm resulting from the introduction of the building will be less than substantial.

Accordingly, as required by paragraph 196 of the Framework and policy SE7 of the CELPS, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. The public benefits of the proposal are discussed below in the planning balance section of the report.

There are other heritage assets within the vicinity of the site including:

- The Grade II* listed Mill Building
- The Grade II listed Mill Cottage
- The Grade II listed Packhorse Bridge
- The Grade II listed Quarry Bank House
- The Grade II* listed Apprentice House

Due to the distance to these listed buildings and the intervening topography and vegetation there is not considered to be any significant impact upon the significance of these designated heritage assets or their setting.

The conservation officer has commented on the proposals and notes that the contemporary design of this new permanent structure can be accommodated within the complex of buildings on this site and would act as a contrasting architectural element in the landscape. He concludes that the proposed cafe will not harm the setting of the listed buildings in its surroundings.

Green Belt

The construction of new buildings in the Green Belt are identified as inappropriate development, unless they are for one of the identified exceptions listed in paragraph 145 of the Framework and policy PG3 of the CELPS. In this case the proposed café building does not meet any of the exception criteria and is therefore an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt. Inappropriate development is, by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Whilst there is a building on the site at present, this was allowed on a temporary basis until February 2020, and therefore the site is effectively an undeveloped site. The proposed development will encroach into this area of countryside and will reduce the openness of the area. Accordingly there is harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, loss of openness (the essential characteristic of Green Belts) and encroachment into the countryside;

safeguarding the countryside from encroachment being one of the five purposes of Green Belts.

Paragraph 144 of the Framework advises that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The other considerations that are relevant in this case are discussed in the planning balance section below.

Design

The new single storey building is set against the backdrop of the existing garden wall set within proposed orchard planting. The building is positioned away from the garden wall and its roof is no higher than the height of the wall, so that it is invisible from within the Walled Garden. The corner of the structure closest to the end of the wall has been left open which ensures that as much of the wall is visible as possible and the entrance elevation is splayed to open up views to the wall. In addition, glazed elements inside the building ensure the wall is seen through the structure

The structure adopts a contemporary flat roof appearance, which minimises its overall bulk and massing. The proposed materials include: powder coated aluminium framing which encloses the public café area and scorched larch boarding to the kitchen and service areas, including a concealed service yard for waste and deliveries. The roof is a lead coloured single ply membrane with 'lead' rolls to mimic traditional roofing materials. Externally, the existing grassed slope is cut back and retained with a low brick wall. This area of grass will be planted with orchard trees. Generally, the surface for paving follows the general pattern of the whole site of sealed gravel with reclaimed York stone defining the main path to the entrance door.

The low level, contemporary and relatively lightweight appearance is considered to be sensitive to the proximate designated and local heritage assets and their settings in accordance with policy SE1 of the CELPS.

Living conditions

Policy DC3 of the MBLP seeks to protect the living conditions of residential occupiers, and states that development should not significantly injure the amenities of adjoining or nearby residential property due to matters such as loss of privacy, overbearing effect, loss of sunlight and daylight and traffic generation and car parking.

The Gardener's Cottage, which is located at the North West corner of the walled garden is the nearest residential property to the application site. It is understood that this property is let out by the National Trust as a dwelling. However this property is located approximately 70m from the application site and as such the proposed café is not considered to raise any significant concerns regarding the impact upon living conditions for this property. It should also be noted that any occupiers of this dwelling will be accustomed to the presence of significant numbers of people now that the recently restored walled garden is a significant attraction to visitors. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with policy DC3 of the MBLP.

Highways

The café is to be provided as a facility for existing visitors of the Quarry Bank Mill site, and replaces an existing temporary facility. Therefore it is not anticipated that the proposal will generate a significant parking demand, which cannot be accommodated within the enhanced parking facilities provided as part of permission 14/3242M. No significant highway safety or traffic generation issues are therefore raised.

It should also be noted that the wider Quarry Bank site is approximately 900 metres from Styal railway station, and has its own bus stop within the site. Visitors to the site are therefore not wholly reliant on the private car.

Trees and landscape

There are no significant arboricultural implications arising from the proposed development. The proposal therefore complies with policies DC9 of the MBLP and SE5 of the CELPS.

Similarly, no significant landscape impact is identified, having regard to the limited scale of the café building, and its position adjacent to the walled garden. Additional orchard planting is proposed, which is specifically supported by the Cheshire Gardens Trust, however limited details have been provided for this planting and proposed hard surfaces around the building. Appropriate landscape conditions are therefore recommended to ensure compliance with policy SE4 of the CELPS and DC8 of the MBLP.

Ecology

Great Crested Newts

A number of ponds are located within 250m of the proposed development and a small population of great crested newts has previously been recorded at one of these ponds. The application site however offers very limited habitat for great crested newts and does not support any features likely to be utilised by newts for shelter and protection. The proposed development would not result in the fragmentation or isolation of great crested newt habitat.

The potential impacts of the proposed development are limited to the low risk of any newts that venture onto the site being killed or injured during the construction process. In order to address this risk the applicant's ecological consultant has recommended a suite of 'reasonable avoidance measures'

The nature conservation officer advises that provided these measures are implemented the proposed development would be highly unlikely to result in a breach of the Habitat Regulations. Consequently, it is not necessary for the Council to have regard to the Habitat Regulations during the determination of this application.

Hedgehogs

The ecological assessment has highlighted the potential presence of this priority species in the vicinity of the proposed development. The ecological assessment includes a method statement of measures to minimise the risk of hedgehogs being disturbed during the proposed works. These measures are acceptable.

Appropriate conditions are recommended to ensure that the submitted Great Crested Newt and Hedgehog mitigation measures are implemented:

Lighting

Any additional external lighting associated with the proposed permanent café buildings may have an adverse effect on wildlife and particularly bats associated with the surrounding adjacent woodland. Clarification has been requested from the applicant on the extent of any lighting proposed and will be reported as an update.

Nesting Birds

The submitted ecological report highlights that the existing building on site has potential for use by nesting birds, therefore a nesting bird survey condition is recommended.

Subject to the above conditions, the proposal is considered to comply with policy NE11 of the MBLP and SE3 of the CELPS.

Archaeology

Quarry Bank Mill is recorded in the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (CHER 2617/1/1) where it is noted that the site was established alongside the River Bollin in 1784 by Samuel Greg. The complex, much of which is Listed as Grade II* and Grade II, saw further development and expansion during the 19th century. The estate is now owned by the National Trust.

A watching brief was recommended with regard to the 2014 application and a project design was approved for the work. However, none of the mitigation was focused on the proposed café site and therefore no archaeological issues are raised.

Planning Balance and conclusions

The proposal is considered to be an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt, which reduces openness and encroaches into the countryside. The identified harm to significance of the heritage assets is considered to amount to less than substantial harm, and should therefore be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

In terms of public benefits, the recent restoration works to the Upper Garden, including the restoration of the historic glasshouse and back sheds, the provision of an ancillary retail offer within one of the restored back sheds, the temporary provision of a cafe and landscape restoration works have been a key component in opening up the wider site for visitors, and enabling the wider understanding and appreciation of the totality of the site.

The temporary café has proved to be a very popular destination for visitors, and it serves to relieve the Mill Yard café, distributing people around the wider site effectively. This application for a permanent building reflects the success of the temporary provision which sought to test the need for refreshments in this area of the Quarry Bank complex. The applicant's submission outlines that since the erection of the temporary café the seating outside around the building is very popular with visitors. The internal seating area is limited in the building which does encourage more outdoor sitting. More importantly, this outdoor facility at the Upper Gardens contrasts with the fully enclosed offer in the Mill Café which is within one of the old mill buildings. At the Mill, there is limited opportunity for outdoor seating. At the Upper Garden, the café is sited on a south facing valley side and offers sheltered long views across the gardens and valley, and the outdoor seating provides an appropriate facility associated with the now very attractive historical Upper Garden.

As noted above, the café in this position relieves the pressure from the main café in the Mill Yard and allows visitors to explore the wider site without having to return to the Mill Yard for refreshments. The site is conveniently located on a route between the Mill yard, and the Styal Village properties to the north of the wider estate. The café undoubtedly increases the attraction of the Upper Garden to visitors, and the income generated by the café is all re-invested into the conservation work throughout the site. Any increase in visitor numbers will also be a benefit to the visitor economy of Cheshire East as a whole.

These considerations in favour of the proposal, including the identified public benefits are considered to clearly outweigh the less than substantial harm to the Styal Conservation Area, and the walled garden.

These same benefits of the proposal also contribute towards the “other considerations” needed to clearly outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt. In addition to these benefits, the applicant has undertaken an options appraisal (for their internal use) to consider other options for the proposed café. Five options were considered, and these are outlined below:

- **Demolish the existing structure and provide no catering facility in the garden (Option1)**
This option would remove any development from the historic environment and would allow the slip garden to be returned to Orchard. However, the applicant notes that the enjoyment of the garden by visitors would be diminished; visitor numbers are projected to grow and without this facility the remaining facilities would be over stretched; the benefits and legacy of outside funding at risk of not being realised in the long term; visits to the garden area will likely reduce and dwell time will reduce; the viability of the shop would be affected; financial assessment illustrates that this is not a financially viable option.
- **Demolish the existing café and provide mobile catering at times of potential high demand (Option 2)**
This option would again remove any development from the historic environment and would allow the slip garden to be returned to Orchard. However, the applicant notes that the same dis-benefits outlined for option 1 would apply to this option.
- **Demolish the existing café and convert the Gardener’s Cottage to a café (Option 3)**
This option was the original intention at the time of the application for the temporary café. The intention with the temporary café was to allow time for the viability of this option to be fully investigated. This option avoids development in the Green Belt and the historic environment and allows the slip garden to be returned to orchard. This option provides a much less flexible arrangement for catering with an inefficient layout, and would be much more costly in staffing terms; discourages long term curatorial aspirations to return the house to its original smaller layout as the “Gardener’s Cottage”; is less central in terms of access from the car park and other areas of the site; rental income from house will be lost; provides less covers than the proposed unit; is further from the shop and will affect passing retail trade; financial assessment illustrates that this is not a financially viable option.

- Seek extended planning permission for the existing structure (Option 4)**

The positive aspect of this option is that in the short term it maintains the existing situation in terms of catering in the Upper Garden and requires no major building disruption. However, in the long term (beyond 5 years) the temporary nature of this building means that it is not physically or financially viable; it does not cater for growing / target visitor numbers; and is too small as a long term option with very small food preparation and storage areas.
- New café development on existing temporary café site (Option 5)**

This is the current proposal and the applicant's preferred option as their evidence suggests that this is both needed and wanted by visitors; financial assessment illustrates that this is a financially viable option; the benefits and legacy of the externally funded project are protected in the long term; will provide a well designed and top quality permanent facility in the garden environment; overall offer will be improved due to better planned space having learned from previous 3 years of operation; good landscape design can incorporate elements of the former orchard use; and it provides excellent access opportunities for all visitors. The dis-benefits of this option are that it will involve new building in the Green Belt; it uses land which was once orchard; and it requires significant funding.

The options appraisal suggests that the only long term options for the site are the current proposal or the use of the Gardener's Cottage. The Gardener's Cottage is located to the north west of the walled garden. The viability of this placement has proven to be difficult for the applicant as the cellular layout and domestic scale of the rooms does not offer suitable accommodation for the requirements of a café, has limited accessibility and the position of the Cottage does not work well with the visitors routes that are established on the site. The Gardener's Cottage is part of the history of the site and the National Trust are considering altering the Cottage to restore it to its original form, which will involve removal of a later extension which intrudes into the walled garden. This would make its use as a café even less viable. Furthermore, due to the configuration of the rooms within the building, it is considered that the Gardeners Cottage would not be easily accessible for all. The restrictive accessibility includes access into the building from outside, limited opportunity for self service areas and manoeuvrability within the spaces. For all of these reasons the applicant has confirmed that the re-use of the Gardener's Cottage is not an option for the Trust.

It is therefore accepted that the only long-term viable option for a café in the Upper Garden area is the current proposal. The considerations set out above in terms of the popularity of the facility amongst visitors, its ability to help to distribute visitors throughout the site, its convenient location as a stepping stone to wider parts of the site, and the absence of any viable alternative, are considered to clearly outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt and do amount to very special circumstances.

Policy EG4 of the CELPS seeks to protect and enhance the unique features of Cheshire East that attract visitors to the area, including their settings, whilst encouraging investment. The policy explains that this will be achieved through a range of measures including the protection of Cheshire East's tourist assets, such as Quarry Bank Mill, protecting visitor attraction sites and promoting the enhancement and expansion of existing visitor attractions and tourist accommodation, and the provision of new visitor and tourism facilities, in sustainable and appropriate locations;

Policy EG4 maintains that proposals for tourist development outside the Principal Towns, Key Service Centres or Local Service Centres will be supported where they are either located within an existing or replacement building; or there is evidence that the facilities are required in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction, and the scale, design and use of the proposal is compatible with its wider setting, it would not be detrimental to the amenities of residential areas, the proposals are served by adequate access and infrastructure; and the site has access to local services and employment. In this case, it is considered that the facilities are required in association with the heritage assets on the Quarry Bank estate. Anchor sites such as Quarry Bank Mill are considered to be important for the local cultural and visitor economy. The current proposal supports the development of tourism infrastructure, an improved environment at the site and a focus on customer service to ensure a quality visitor experience.

As outlined above, the scale, design and use of the proposal is compatible with its wider setting. It will not result in any significant injury to the amenity of nearby residential properties. The Quarry Bank site has adequate access and infrastructure, and has access to local services and employment. In addition, no significant ecological issues are raised, and the visual and landscape impacts of the development are acceptable. No significant environmental effects have been identified.

The proposal is considered to be a sustainable form of development under the definition of The Framework.

Consequently, for the reasons outlined above, there are not considered to be any significant adverse impacts that would outweigh the presumption in favour of sustainable development in this case. The application is therefore recommended for approval subject to conditions.

In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to debate, vary or add conditions / informatives / planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Head of Planning (Regulation) has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Northern Planning Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to following conditions

1. Commencement of development (3 years)
2. Development in accord with approved plans
3. Materials as application
4. Landscaping - submission of details
5. Landscaping (implementation)

6. Development to be carried out in accordance with the Method Statement detailed in section 3 of the submitted Ecological Assessment
7. Nesting bird survey to be submitted

