

Bath & North East Somerset Council
Planning Services
Trimbridge House
Trim Street
Bath
BA1 2 DP

FAO: Alice Barnes,

28th July 2010

Dear Alice,

**Applications for retrospective planning permission for development at
Widcombe Lodge, South Widcombe, Hinton Blewitt.
10/02951/FUL - Erection of double garage with games room over (retrospective)
10/02953/FUL - Conversion and rebuilding of existing barn to form self catering
holiday accommodation (retrospective) (resubmission)**

Thank you for contacting the Mendip Hills AONB Unit regarding the above applications for retrospective planning permission relating to development within the AONB at South Widcombe, an isolated small hamlet near Hinton Blewitt. I have been giving this matter further consideration. As you know, my initial response was that the AONB Unit would not be submitting comments. This was because the development concerned seemed from the application documents to fall outside the criteria set out in the 'Guidelines for the referral of planning applications to the Mendip Hills AONB Unit for monitoring' agreed with our local authority partners. However, after being contacted by members of the Parish Council expressing their great concerns about the development, then discussing the matter with you and visiting the area around the application sites to assess the landscape impacts of the development, I now feel it appropriate for the AONB Unit to submit the following comments.

As you know, PPS7 confirms that AONBs have the highest status of protection in terms of landscape and scenic beauty and that the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should therefore be given great weight in development +control decisions in these areas. The landscape within which the application sites are situated is very attractive and sensitive to changes through development.

Both of the buildings concerned are prominent visual elements that detract from the natural beauty of the landscape, particularly when seen from the long distance Limestone Link footpath. The rebuilt and converted barn is also highly visible from the important viewing point on high ground at 'Prospect Stile' to the east of the development sites. It is accepted that the former outbuilding and barn at the application sites would have also featured in some views within the landscape, but judging by photographs I have seen, they appear to have been more modest,

traditional vernacular structures than the current buildings with far less visual impact in the landscape. The new structures have significantly greater scale than the originals making them appear out of character with the local vernacular and this combined with the new roof tiles increases their visual intrusion.

With the above in mind, the AONB Unit considers that the development completed without the necessary planning permission is highly undesirable and conflicts with the Council's Adopted Local Plan policies NE2 (seeking protection of the natural beauty of the designated AONB landscape) and ET9 (relating to the re-use of rural buildings).

I would also draw your attention to the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan which sets out how the Council will carry out its commitments in terms of protecting the area under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Plan may be seen via the following link:

http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/publications/up_161122_management_plan_final_word_version_nov_08.pdf

The AONB Unit does not feel that the development concerned meets the Management Plan Objectives under D1 (p27) in terms of enhancing the distinctive character of the landscape or sympathetic design.

In addition under Objective D1, the Management Plan seeks to safeguard 'Dark Skies' within the AONB. It is considered that the roof lights of the garage/games room building are undermining this objective.

The AONB Unit consequently feels that planning permission should not be granted for the development that has been carried out. If however, the Council is minded to grant permission, it is suggested that the roof materials should be changed on both buildings to weathered clay tiles in order to reduce the visual impact of the buildings and the roof lights of the garage/games room removed.

I would be grateful if you could inform me of the Council's decision on this application for our monitoring records.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Richards

Planning Liaison Officer
Mendip Hills AONB Unit

cc Cllr Dawn Hill AONB Partnership Committee Chair; Hinton Blewitt PC