

Flintshire Local Development Plan Examination in Public Scheduled Hearing 14 May 2021: Matter 13

Conversion of Rural Buildings Policy HN4 - B

Objection by Huw Evans Planning

1.0 Reasons for the Objection

1.1 This objection is made on the basis that the policy is unsound as it is not deliverable.

2.0 Evidence

2.1 Criteria a) is unreasonable and unnecessary in a Flintshire context. Firstly, it is not logical to advertise premises for an employment use in the absence of planning permission for an employment use. It simply does not generate any interest as prospective purchasers/tenants will occupy existing available premises of which there are plenty in Flintshire. The Plan acknowledges that it has more employment land and premises that it needs to meet the projected jobs requirement.

2.2 With regard to evidence that the policy delivers its purpose to encourage and increase employment premises in the rural area, a freedom of information request seeking to identify how many barn conversions to employment use have been consented/implemented over the last 10 years failed to reveal any such conversions. The planning authority acknowledged that it did not record this information and consequently was unable to review and monitor whether or not the policy is working. None of the 65 properties subject to applications for conversion from 2007 to January 2017 were for commercial/employment use.

2.3 This requirement of the policy therefore serves no useful purpose and only serves to unnecessarily delay development. The situation is different in other rural areas such as the more affluent areas of Cheshire where land values are significantly higher and allocated employment land is further away. Here the policy works well but in Flintshire it clearly does not. The Plan is therefore unsound as the policy is a repeat of UDP policy which fails to deliver its stated purpose. If there is a genuine and viable proposal to convert to employment use then it is simply a matter of due consideration through the development management process thereby realising the aspiration of the council where it is deliverable.

2.4 Criterion c) is also unreasonable and undeliverable. Firstly, conversion costs are almost in every case significantly higher than new build and therefore are very unlikely to be affordable for those in need. Secondly, rural conversion properties are generally more isolated from local services such as shops, schools, medical facilities and public transport

and so are not a sustainable form of development for those on lower incomes. There is no evidence to support that such conversions will provide rural affordable housing.

3.0 Conclusion

3.1 Whilst the policy to convert rural buildings to residential use is supported, criteria a) and c) will fail to deliver the use that they require. In particular criteria a) will effectively block conversion to residential use. Criterion a) is simply unnecessary and serves only to delay and frustrate appropriate development. The policy is therefore unsound as it is not deliverable.

Huw Evans Planning

25 April 2021

HN4-B: Residential Conversion of Rural Buildings

The change of use to a dwelling of an existing non-residential building outside settlement boundaries will only be permitted where:

- a. if suitable for employment use, the building has been advertised at a reasonable price for sale or lease for an employment generating use, for a period of at least one year without success; or
- b. residential conversion is a subordinate part of a scheme for business re-use; or
- c. the resultant housing would contribute to an identified need for affordable housing to meet local needs.

provided that:

- i. the building is structurally sound and capable of conversion without significant extension, extensive rebuilding, or external alteration, as evidenced by an independent structural survey;
- ii. the building has a traditional character due to its form, bulk and general design, in keeping with its surroundings, and is worthy of retention and re-use;
- iii. the scheme of conversion does not prejudice the character of the building or the rural character of the locality and retains any inherent traditional architectural and historic features which merit retention;
- iv. The creation of a residential curtilage does not have a harmful effect on the character of the countryside;
- v. reasonable standards of living conditions are provided by the proposal.