

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 September 2016

by Mark Dakeyne BA (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 4 October 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/A2335/W/16/3146217

Addington Lodge Stables, Nether Kellet, Carnforth, Lancashire LA6 1DZ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Adrian Gott against the decision of Preston City Council.
 - The application Ref 15/00653/FUL, dated 26 May 2015, was refused by notice dated 19 November 2016.
 - The development proposed is described as 'the demolition of a stable building and the construction of a farm office'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The proposal would involve the demolition of 2 separate stable buildings and the erection of 2 single storey buildings providing office space, a staff area with toilets and a plant room as described on the Council's decision notice and the appeal form. I have considered the appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the development would represent the sustainable growth of rural business.

Reasons

4. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) at Section 3 and paragraph 28 indicates that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. Plans should support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings and promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses.
 5. The Lancaster Core Strategy (July 2008) (CS) was adopted before the publication of the Framework. The preamble to Policy SC1 of the CS, an overarching sustainable development policy, indicates that development which meets local needs in rural areas should be well related to any settlement and within easy reach of village facilities. However, the policy itself has criteria which are more applicable for assessing development proposals in urban areas
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and does not refer to sustainable rural businesses. In this respect I give Policy SC1 limited weight in assessing the proposal.

6. However, the post-Framework Development Management Development Plan Document (DMDPD) adopted in December 2014 allows for economic development in rural areas through Policy DM7, including proposals which maintain and enhance rural vitality and character and improve the sustainability of rural communities by bringing local economic, environmental and community benefits. DMDPD Policy DM15, as a policy which is not specific to rural areas, supports, amongst other things, the utilisation of previously developed land but refers to there being sufficient access, including for cycling and walking. Policy DM20 is a generic policy which seeks development, particularly that which generates significant movements, to be located where sustainable travel patterns can be achieved and the need to travel is minimised. However, Policies DM15 and DM20 need to be read in the context of Paragraphs 29 and 34 of the Framework relating to sustainable transport in rural areas and Policy DM7.
7. The proposal is intended to provide offices and staff facilities in connection with an egg production business operated on land to the east of the appeal site. I noted at my site visit one large poultry shed in active use about ½ km to the east and a large new shed nearing completion but not yet in use somewhat closer to the appeal site. A new agricultural dwelling is also being constructed on land between the appeal site and the original poultry shed. There is limited evidence about the office space that would be required for the egg production business but undoubtedly some ancillary offices and staff facilities would be necessary. That said the floorspace would not be adjacent to the production areas such that staff would need to walk up and down the lane between the two.
8. To my mind there appears to be a reasonable case for providing some office floorspace and staff facilities in connection with the egg production business as such development would support the sustainable growth of an agricultural business. Staff using the facilities would not be making additional journeys as they would already be on site. Providing space for office staff directly related to a growing agricultural business is supported by national and local policy. There is limited evidence to support the need for office space for up to 8 staff. Moreover, I have reservations about how effective it would be to manage, and how practical it would be for staff to make use of facilities, on a site away from the production areas. However, the buildings would allow for further employment growth and make use of a vacant previously developed site.
9. However, in assessing the current proposal I have also had regard to the site immediately to the east where a planning permission granted in December 2012 appears to have commenced sometime ago, judging by the staining on the blockwork, but has not progressed very far. That permission provides for a 'farm office block' and stables in an L-shaped building. The application plans indicate that both sites are in the same ownership. In this regard the amount of combined floorspace would exceed that required for the egg production business.
10. Due to the existence of the 2012 permission I find it necessary to judge whether the appeal proposal in addition to the 2012 approval would represent the sustainable growth of rural business. On the basis that there has been no take-up of the floorspace in the 3-4 years since the permission, it would seem

to me that the permitted building and particularly the 'farm office block' would be available to meet the need for the egg production business offices and staff facilities. The appellant refers to his other business interests needing the permitted building and the limited amount of employment floorspace available in the rural east of Lancaster District but the lack of construction activity does not reflect these circumstances. Moreover, there is little information about the other agricultural or rural businesses referred to by the appellant. Nor is there information about other rural businesses in the locality with a need for floorspace. On this basis it is not clear why both the permitted and proposed buildings are needed to support rural businesses. Therefore, it seems to me that some of the floorspace would be speculative.

11. The overall quantum of office floorspace, some of it seemingly speculative and unlikely to be related to land-based businesses, would create a significant number of journeys to work and other vehicle movements relative to most small rural businesses. There is no bus route passing the site and the service for the nearby villages of Over Kellet and Nether Kellet, which runs along the lane to the west, is not frequent and would be unlikely to be a reasonable alternative to the car. The country roads which lead to the site do not have pavements or lighting and would be unsuitable for walking. Moreover, the road network would not be cycled by many for journeys to work even though some lanes are shown as cycle routes and there is an intention to provide bike stores and shower facilities as part of the development. A nearby public footpath which crosses fields to Over Kellet would not be likely to be used to access the development.
12. Those employed at the site from the main centres of population to the west and south-west, including Carnforth and Lancaster, would be mainly reliant on the private vehicle as would any persons from local villages and the surrounding rural area. Although a travel plan could be implemented this would be unlikely to change travel modes significantly in view of the above limitations.
13. The limited services in Over Kellet and Nether Kellet – both have a small shop and pub - may benefit from some additional custom from those employed on the site but, given that the villages are not on the site's doorstep, this is unlikely to be significant. As such the proposal would not enhance the rural vitality of the nearby villages or bring them local economic and community benefits.
14. It is the case that the development would utilise a previously developed site, the stables having been used in association with a business that reared national hunt race horses but which has now ceased. The use of previously developed land receives support from Policies DM7, DM9, DM15 and DM16.
15. Although the development would be visible from the site entrance and roadside and there are open views across the fields to the north, the site sits in a natural hollow such that the proposal would not be prominent in a landscape which has no specific designation. The buildings would utilise stone and slate and would be of appropriate scale and design. The proposal complies with Policy SC5 of the CS and Policies DM28 and DM35 of the DMDPD as the development would reflect the quality of landscape and would result in an improved appearance subject to suitable landscaping.

Conclusions

16. The proposal would make use of previously developed land and would be well designed but the combined development would be relatively isolated such that it would not be economically and environmentally sustainable. I conclude that the development taken as a whole would not represent the sustainable growth of rural business and would be contrary to the Framework and Policy DM7 of the DMDPD as it would not be of an appropriate scale. There would also be a degree of conflict with Policies DM15 and DM20 due to the lack of accessibility for walking and cycling and the non-sustainable travel patterns that would result from the speculative elements of the overall development. In applying these policies I have had regard to the fact that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions in rural areas will be limited but careful consideration still needs to be given to the scale and location of all types of businesses in the countryside.
17. I have taken into account the previous appeal decision¹ relating to a larger amount of floorspace. My conclusions on the economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability in relation to location are consistent with the previous Inspector.
18. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

Mark Dakeyne

INSPECTOR

¹ Appeal decision ref: APP/A2335/A/13/2204688 dated 15 May 2014