
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 November 2016

by Mike Hayden BSc DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 15 December 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/W/16/3156216

**Gault Hill Farm, Crease Road, Sawtry, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire
PE28 5XQ**

- 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 J. and Mrs C. Vella against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 15/02226/FUL, dated 24 November 2015, was refused by notice dated 20 April 2016.
 - The development comprises the change of use of land from agriculture to residential curtilage and erection of a stable building and additional workshop units.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the change of use of land from agriculture to residential curtilage and the erection of a stable building and additional workshop units at Gault Hill Farm, Crease Road, Sawtry, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE28 5XQ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 15/02226/FUL, dated 24 November 2015, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents: 1277/3 Rev A, 1277/6, 1277/7 and the Design and Access Statement Revision A dated 18 February 2016.
 - 3) No development shall commence until details of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the buildings hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Main Issues

2. The Council does not object to the proposed stable building and the change of use of land from agriculture to residential curtilage. Therefore, the main issues in this appeal are:
 - The effect of the proposed additional workshop units and associated parking and turning area on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding countryside; and

- Whether the proposed workshop units would constitute sustainable development in the countryside having regard to the relevant policies of the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

Reasons

3. The appeal site comprises a courtyard of former farm buildings, surrounded by a curtilage of open land laid to grass. The buildings were converted to business and residential uses following planning permission in 1997. They house three small businesses and the appellants' dwelling. The appellants' own business has been operating from the site since 2007.
4. The proposed workshop building would accommodate the expansion needs of the appellant's business, which is an established rural enterprise. Paragraph 28 of the Framework supports the sustainable growth and expansion of businesses in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings. I acknowledge that the workshops would not be within the curtilage of the site previously permitted for business use and that Policy LP21 of draft Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (2013) seeks to limit the expansion of businesses in the countryside to within their existing operational sites. However, this is an emerging policy, which has not yet been subject to examination. I do not see the same operational limitation placed on rural business expansion in the Framework or in the relevant policies of the development plan. Therefore, I attach limited weight to Policy LP21 in this appeal.
5. Saved Policies E7 and E11 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan Part One (1995) (the Local Plan) support the expansion of existing firms and small businesses subject to traffic and environmental considerations. The reasoned justification to Policy E11 in paragraph 3.37 of the Local Plan states that it is the District Council's policy to allow the growth of existing firms "within existing curtilages or beyond" provided it causes no detriment to other interests such as excessive traffic or unsuitable minor roads. Policies CS1 and CS7 of the Huntingdonshire Core Strategy (2009) also promote business development in sustainable and accessible locations. Likewise the expectations in paragraph 28 of the Framework are that rural business growth should be sustainable and respect the character of the countryside.
6. With regard to whether the proposed development would be sustainable in terms of its location and accessibility. Whilst the appeal site is not within a settlement or served by public transport, paragraph 29 of the Framework recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable travel will vary from urban to rural areas. The site is within easy access of the motorway network, being just 3 kilometres from junction 15 of the A1(M), and is a similar distance from the village of Sawtry, where there are other local businesses and support services. Although additional car parking is proposed in conjunction with workshops, this is not unreasonable given the other businesses on site and limited parking and circulation space within existing courtyard. There is little evidence to suggest that the proposed expansion to the appellant's business accommodation would lead to a significant increase in car journeys or vehicle traffic. Neither is there any indication from the highway authority that the minor road serving the appeal site would be unsuitable for the scale of expansion proposed.
7. In terms of the effect of the proposals on the character and appearance of the site and surrounding countryside. Policy En25 of the Local Plan expects new

development to respect the scale, form, materials and design of buildings in the locality and Policy CS1 of the Core Strategy, in line with paragraph 58 of the Framework, promotes development which respects the setting and character of its surroundings. I acknowledge that the proposed workshops would not be contained within the existing courtyard of buildings. However, the workshop building would appear as a modest extension to the courtyard, reflecting the low level, rural character of the host buildings, with matching brick, slate and timber cladding materials. I noted a variety other farm buildings and rural dwellings in the surrounding area and nothing to suggest that the buildings as proposed to be extended would appear out of character.

8. I also saw that the surrounding countryside is an open and flat agricultural landscape with long distance views. Whilst I acknowledge that the workshops and associated parking, access and turning areas would extend the built footprint of the existing complex into land which is currently open, they would be contained within the overall curtilage of site, defined by post and rail fencing. Positioned to the east side of the courtyard buildings they would also be largely screened from view from passing traffic on the road to the west and north. Therefore, the proposed workshops, parking and turning areas would not be prominent or visually intrusive within the surrounding rural area. As such they would not harm the intrinsic beauty and character of the surrounding countryside recognised in paragraph 17 of the Framework.
9. For completeness, I have also considered the proposed stable building and change of use of land to residential curtilage. The stable block would be small scale, with a design and materials that would reflect the appearance of the courtyard buildings. It is not unusual to see stables in the countryside and although separate from the main group, it would be close enough to appear ancillary and not isolated. The proposed change of use of the land to the north of the courtyard to residential use would include the creation of what appear to be private parking and turning areas. However, in the context of the existing buildings, this would not cause significant harm to the appearance of the site or surroundings.
10. On this basis, I conclude that the proposed development would not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of appeal site or the surrounding rural area and that it would constitute sustainable development in the countryside. Accordingly, it would comply with saved Policies E7, E11 and En25 of the Local Plan and Policies CS1 and CS7 of the Core Strategy. It would also be consistent with paragraphs 17, 28, 29 and 58 of the Framework.

Conditions

11. I have considered which planning conditions are required having regard to the tests contained in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and the conditions suggested by the Council. I have attached conditions limiting the life of the permission in accordance with the requirements of the Act and specifying the approved plans for the avoidance of doubt, including the Design and Access Statement which specifies the area of land subject to change of use. I have also included a condition requiring the external materials on the proposed buildings be agreed with the Council to maintain the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area.

Conclusion

12. For the reasons given above and taking account of all other matters, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed, subject to the conditions specified.

M Hayden

INSPECTOR