

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 January 2017

by AJ Steen BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 30 January 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/16/3159676

Longview Folly Farm, Twenty Ways, Petersfield GU32 1BT

- 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 & Mrs J Long against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref SDNP/15/06462/FUL, dated 23 December 2015, was refused by notice dated 29 March 2016.
 - The development proposed is new walker/cyclist/horse riding overnight accommodation (& associated facilities).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would constitute sustainable development, with particular reference to whether it would conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the South Downs National Park; and
 - whether the proposed development would affect ecology and biodiversity in the area.

Reasons

Sustainable development

3. The Framework sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development, defined as development in accordance with the Framework as a whole. This includes approving development proposals that accord with the development plan, including the East Hampshire Joint Core Strategy (CS) and East Hampshire District Local Plan (LP). Sustainable development has three dimensions that must be considered together, being economic, social and environmental.
 4. Longview Folly Farm comprises a group of buildings and a field located within a valley in the South Downs National Park (SDNP). It is accessed via a track that is also a public footpath that continues past the site through the SDNP. It is surrounded by fields with lines of mature trees on the field boundaries and extending along the track and public footpath.
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5. The proposal would repair the existing buildings whose present lawful use is unclear that are in poor condition that detracts from the landscape and scenic beauty of the SDNP. The proposals would use these buildings for purposes supporting the proposed tourist accommodation, including stabling, cycle storage and repair, secure lockers and laundry. The buildings would be re-clad with timber shingles to the roofs and timber cladding to the walls. As a result of the design of the proposed development and choice of materials, the proposed alterations would improve the appearance of the existing buildings.
6. The former chicken sheds that are dispersed around the field would be replaced with log cabins, with additional camping within the field. The buildings would be designed to reflect their rural location, but would be larger and more prominent than the existing chicken sheds, resulting in more built form dispersed around the site. In addition the shipping containers kept on the site, which are not permanent structures, would be removed and replaced with a family cabin that would be a more permanent fixture that would be prominent in this location. This would result in these buildings appearing prominent in views from the surrounding footpath and, along with the proposed camping, would encroach into and be intrusive within this protected landscape, such that they would harm the landscape and scenic beauty of the SDNP.
7. Given the location down a narrow track within the rural area and some distance from the nearest settlement, the location of the site is remote. For these reasons, it would not be easily accessible other than by walkers, cyclists and horse riders, but is located some distance from the South Downs Way and Queen Elizabeth Country Park that it is proposed to serve. I note that a minibus may be provided to move customers from the South Downs Way to and from the site and other services and facilities, and facilities would be provided to teach environmental crafts. However, it is not clear how such a system would work or how the business would be sustained in such a location away from services, facilities, the South Downs Way and the Country Park.
8. Policy CP9 of the CS allows new tourism facilities and visitor accommodation through the re-use of suitable rural buildings or rural business diversification, particularly where it would benefit local communities and support the rural economy. Policy TM3 permits the conversion of suitable rural buildings, particularly those on working farms. Whilst I consider that the conversion of the buildings could comply with those policies, provision of new buildings and facilities on the majority of the remainder of the land would not.
9. For these reasons, the proposed development would provide some social benefit from the provision of tourism accommodation and providing opportunities for the public to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the area. It would provide economic benefits through its contribution toward the diversification of the rural economy and it is proposed to harness solar and wind power to provide much of the energy needs of the development. However the remote location and harm to the landscape and scenic beauty of the SDNP would outweigh the social and economic benefits. For these reasons, the proposed development would be contrary to the Framework and Policies CP9, CP20, CP29 and CP31 of the CS and TM3 of the LP that seek to provide high quality development that conserves or enhances the natural beauty and tranquillity of the valued landscape of the SDNP.

Ecology and biodiversity

10. There is limited information before me on the ecological value of the site. However, the Council indicate protected species, specifically bats and great crested newts, may be present on the site or land adjacent. Given the proximity of the site to woodland and there appears to be a pond in a neighbouring field, it is reasonably likely to have some significance either in its own right or in combination with those features in terms of providing habitat for protected species.
11. National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and Circular 06/2005: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation confirm that surveys should be carried out prior to planning permission being granted where there is a reasonable likelihood of a protected species being present and affected.
12. Should protected species be found on or near the site, it is possible that the development could not go ahead in its proposed form. On that basis, this issue could not be appropriately dealt with by condition.
13. In conclusion, without an appropriate ecological survey of the site, insufficient information has been provided to conclude whether the proposed development would comply with Policy CP21 of the CS, the Framework and Circular 06/2005 that seek to maintain, enhance and protect biodiversity and its surrounding environment. In the absence of that information, I have to conclude that the development would affect ecology and biodiversity in the area.

Conclusion

14. For the above reasons and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

AJ Steen

INSPECTOR