The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 April 2017

by Stephen Hawkins MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 26th April 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/P2114/W/17/3166652
Five Acres, Elm Lane, Calbourne PO30 4JT

- 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 and Mrs S Rolfe against the decision of Isle of Wight Council.
- The application Ref P/01163/16, dated 16 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 31 October 2016.
- The development proposed is a holiday chalet for horse holidays.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this appeal are:

   - Whether this would be a suitable location for the proposal, having regard to the access to local facilities and services.
   - The effect on the character and appearance of the area.
   - Whether the proposal would promote rural tourism.
   - Whether a suitable living environment would be provided for the future visitors, having regard to smells and noise and disturbance from the adjacent stables.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is situated in open countryside and consists of a large paddock which is bounded by mature hedgerows on three sides, containing a substantial timber stable block. The proposed chalet would be used as holiday accommodation in connection with the existing equestrian facilities.

Whether the location is suitable

4. The appeal site is distant from local facilities and services, including those in nearby villages and public transport links. Access would be via narrow, unlit rural roads with no segregation for pedestrians or cyclists. Most visitors would therefore be largely reliant on their cars, not only to access the appeal site but also to visit local shops or other leisure and relaxation opportunities whilst staying there. The above factors are also likely to act as a deterrent to any prospective visitors to intending to arrive at the appeal site by means other than a private car. Such visitors would then have limited opportunity for travel

to other destinations from the appeal site. It would be unrealistic to expect that visitors would not wish or need to visit other local facilities and services at times during their stay. As a result, the proposal would promote a pattern of development with a high level of dependency on the private car as a means of transport.

5. I am given to understand that the nearest bridleways can only be accessed by travelling considerable distances along constrained local roads. Some visitors could be discouraged from taking horses along the local roads, resulting in horses being transported to bridleways or other suitable routes which can be accessed more safely. This would offset any benefit in terms of reducing traffic movements otherwise arising from visitors staying at the same location as their horses. I acknowledge that the area around the appeal site is well-used by horse riders. However, unlike visitors local riders will be familiar with the road conditions. The above reinforces my findings regarding the unsuitable location of the proposal in terms of its dependency on the private car.

6. Therefore, the proposal would not fully accord with Policy SP4 of the adopted Island Plan Core Strategy (CS), as it would not promote growth in tourism that would be sustainable in the sense of being accessible by means of transport other than the private car. Furthermore, the proposal would not make the fullest use of public transport, walking and cycling as required by paragraph 17 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and having regard to its unsuitable location in terms of accessibility, would also be inconsistent with paragraph 28.

Character and appearance

7. The countryside surrounding the appeal site is made up of a patchwork of open fields bounded by hedgerows, only occasionally interspersed by scattered housing. The appeal site and its surroundings therefore possess an open and overwhelmingly rural character. The proposed chalet would be sited behind the stables. It would have similar external materials and a similar overall height to the stables, being partly dug into the rising ground. A small outdoor amenity area would be provided immediately in front.

8. Nevertheless, the proposed chalet would be of a substantial size and bulk, not dissimilar to that of a small bungalow. It would also have an obviously domestic character and appearance on account of its general design, which would include several window openings. Due to its siting, the proposed chalet would be poorly related to the scattered housing in the surrounding area. As a result, the proposed chalet would appear as a somewhat alien feature in its surroundings.

9. It would not be unreasonable to expect that visitors would wish to utilise the outdoor amenity area during their stay for informal recreation or relaxation or for drying washing, in a similar manner to any other residential garden. The attendant trappings of a domestic use such as tables and chairs, play equipment, washing lines and ornamental planting are therefore likely to be present within the outdoor amenity area to some degree. The domestication of this area would emphasise the incongruity of the proposed chalet, as it would be entirely at odds with the otherwise rural surroundings.

10. Whilst parts of the appeal site might be overlooked by nearby houses, there would be limited glimpses of the proposed chalet and its amenity area from the

adjoining roads due to the dense boundary hedgerows. However, that would not significantly offset the unacceptable visual harm identified above. Moreover, the fact that a proposal might be unobtrusive would not be a good reason for allowing otherwise unacceptable development, as it would lead to the progressive undermining of the character of the countryside.

11. As a result, the proposal would seriously detract from the rural character and appearance of the area. Therefore, it would not accord with CS Policy DM2, as it would not achieve a high quality and inclusive design that provides an attractive built environment, complementing the character of its surroundings. The proposal would also not accord with CS Policy DM12, as it would not conserve the Island landscape. Furthermore, the proposal would not accord with CS Policy SP4, as it would compromise the integrity of the natural environment.

Promotion of rural tourism

12. The proposal would assist in developing the Island as a year-round tourism destination in a sector where I am given to understand that there is recognised potential for growth. From the evidence available, I am satisfied that the proposal would amount to the type of niche tourism to which CS Policy SP4 gives qualified support. Also, there is nothing to suggest that the appellants' business would not achieve financial viability in the medium term. This weighs moderately in favour of the appeal scheme. Whilst interested parties have made reference to similar local businesses, from the details provided most of them do not appear to offer the same services as envisaged at the appeal site. Moreover, it is not a function of the planning system to inhibit competition.

Living conditions

13. Most visitors are likely to be staying at the appeal site for short periods, on their holidays in conjunction with the adjacent stables. Some visitors with their own horses may also wish to be close to their animals for supervision purposes. Consequently, visitors are more likely to be tolerant of a reduction in their normal living standards through a degree of smell and noise and disturbance arising from equestrian activities than might otherwise be the case, for example if they were permanent residents or if the stables were unconnected.

14. Therefore, notwithstanding the proximity to the stables, the proposed chalet would provide a suitable environment having regard to the nature of the future occupation. On its own, this matter would not run counter to the objective of supporting sustainable rural tourism at paragraph 28 of the Framework. However, the absence of unacceptable harm in this respect is a neutral factor and would not weigh in favour of the proposal.

Other matters

15. Interested parties have expressed concerns regarding the effects on the living conditions of the occupiers of nearby dwellings, light pollution, increased traffic generation, impact on wildlife, surface water run-off, compliance with planning conditions on a previous permission, animal wellbeing and possible future development of an unrestricted dwelling in the countryside. However, the Council did not object to the proposal in respect of any of these matters and I have not found any reasons to disagree with them. In the light of my findings on the main issues, I have therefore given these matters little weight.

Planning Balance

16. Whether the proposal amounts to sustainable development has to be assessed against the three mutually dependent roles-economic, social and environmental-set out at paragraphs 7 and 8 of the Framework. The proposal would support the growth of the rural economy. There would be benefits to other local businesses from the additional tourist spend as well as employment created in the running of the business and maintenance of the proposed chalet and stables. The increased opportunities afforded to outdoor recreation arising from the proposal could also be regarded as a social benefit. Consequently, the proposal would be consistent with the economic and social roles of sustainable development.

17. However, the above benefits would be very modest, given the scale of the proposal. The adverse environmental impacts arising from the unsuitable location of the appeal site in terms of its limited accessibility by means of transport other than the private car and the harm to the character and appearance of the area would significantly and demonstrably outweigh these modest benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. Consequently, the proposal would not amount to sustainable development.

Conclusion

18. The proposal would not accord with the Development Plan or the Framework and for the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Stephen Hawkins

INSPECTOR