
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 May 2017

by Andy Harwood CMS MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 22 June 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/B1225/W/17/3169611

Alpha Farm, Bere Road, Coldharbour BH20 7PA

- 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 Robert Price against the decision of Purbeck District Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2016/0695, dated 4 November 2016, was refused by notice dated 20 January 2017.
 - The development proposed is the "Change of use of barn from ancillary residential storage, workshop and boiler house to workshop, office and studio printing facility, wellbeing class studio and boiler house with extensions to boiler facility, entrance lobby and raising of eaves and roof. Provision of internal driveway and car park for 10 cars".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The appeal site is located within the South East Dorset Green Belt (GB) and main issues are therefore:
 - Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the GB including the consideration of the effect upon openness for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework);
 - If the development is inappropriate, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development within the GB

3. Alpha Farm is a small holding which is set amongst a wooded area alongside the Bere Road. As well as a cottage, there are some other buildings on the small holding, including a substantial wooden-clad barn.
 4. The proposed development would include the change of use and extension of the existing barn, as well as the creation of the driveway leading to a proposed parking area in front of an existing static caravan. Another shorter driveway is shown on the submitted plans leading to a new wood-chip store within the extended barn although that is not part of the proposals being considered. The Council considered the use of the building would be acceptable. The decision
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was made with reference only to the Framework and not to any specific policies within the Purbeck Local Plan, adopted November 2012 (LP).

5. Paragraph 90 of the Framework accepts the re-use of buildings provided that they are of permanent and substantial construction, as an exception to new buildings being defined as inappropriate in the GB. For such re-use to not be considered inappropriate, a proviso is that it should preserve the openness of the GB and not conflict with the purposes of including land within the GB. Many of the activities involved with the proposed re-use of the building would be largely contained within it and the additions were not considered to be disproportionate by the Council (complying in their view with paragraph 89 of the Framework). However, the engineering works involved in the creation of the driveway and parking area are related to the proposed re-use of the building. Whether the engineering works are looked at independently or as an integral part of the proposed re-use of the building, it is necessary to consider whether or not they would preserve the openness of the GB.
6. The driveway from the existing track into the site would be across a raised area of land which is in an opening amongst the woodland setting. This land currently slopes up substantially close to the track and has a rough, uneven surface covered in grass and other vegetation. Close to the static caravan, I noticed a distinct dip in the land levels which is confirmed by the levels indicated on the submitted plans.
7. The construction of the driveway would involve the scraping away of parts of the surface and levelling off to provide a more gradual slope. This would be covered with gravel. The 10 parking spaces and circulation area would be constructed with a cellular structure filled with stones. This would be raised above the level of the existing land in that position. In this way, the physical changes would increase the volume of material on site, taking up space which would reduce to a very small extent, the openness of the site. It is not clear whether this would be entirely compensated for by the reduction in levels across the narrow driveway. These physical changes may therefore have a very small but nevertheless noticeable impact upon the openness of the GB.
8. The creation of the driveway and the parking area are intended for vehicles to drive over and park in an area which is unsuited for such use at the moment. The reason for refusal does not explicitly refer to the impact of cars resulting in a loss of openness although this is clarified within the report that led to the decision. Furthermore, my view is that when cars travel over the driveway and park on site, they will take up a significant volume of space which will therefore reduce the openness of the site compared with the present situation. The extent of impact upon openness may be variable given the transitory nature of vehicles and will also depend upon how successful the new business proposals are. These vehicles would be largely in addition to those generated by the existing businesses on site. The number of vehicles may also be affected by the potential uptake of the appellant's suggested scheme for collecting clients from nearby public transport hubs, although little detail is provided about that. Furthermore, paragraph 88 of the Framework makes it clear that substantial weight must be given to any GB harm and no particular allowance is made for temporary or transitory impacts.
9. These effects upon openness may not be very visually noticeable in themselves from outside of the site, but they would be noticeable from the track into the

site including by visitors to the existing businesses. Furthermore, the effect upon GB openness is not only related to how visible the changes would be from public viewpoints. The Council has previously approved the creation of a car park at the nearby 'Silent Woman' public house but that does not change the physical impacts of the present proposal which I have considered on its own merits.

10. The nature of the development involving the parking of vehicles is one of urban character in an otherwise very rural area. This would therefore result in an encroachment of urban development within the countryside contrary to one of the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in paragraph 80 of the Framework.
11. I therefore consider in relation to this matter, that the proposal would be inappropriate development within the GB. The Framework states that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances and as I mention above, substantial weight should be given to any harm to the GB.

Other considerations

12. The proposed use would potentially lead to an additional full-time (equivalent) worker at the site. This and the development of the business into the public wellbeing classes and studio will help provide some economic benefits. The proposal would be a farm diversification scheme and a small scale employment use which is supported by LP Policy CO. I give a moderate degree of weight to these modest economic benefits.
13. The proposal would allow Miss Bright who currently works from her home in the cottage on site as an author and illustrator as well as running a printmaking and publishing business to relocate to the barn. This would create more space within the dwelling which would provide more comfortable conditions for her family. I give a small degree of additional weight to the proposal due to these benefits.
14. Although the effect upon GB openness would be noticeable and cause an urban development within the countryside, the visual impacts of this into the wider area would be very limited. The proposal would also involve some additional landscaping and protection of substantial trees (some protected by a Tree Preservation Order) which would mitigate residual visual impacts upon the character and appearance of the area. I do not find any conflict in this respect with the Council's Design Guide¹. There would also be no harm caused to the highway conditions of the nearby road due to additional vehicle movements or to living conditions of any residents nearby. However, the lack of harm in these terms is neutral and does not weigh in favour of or against the proposal.
15. I did look at the car park for the 'Silent Woman' public house from Bere Road. I am not aware of the full circumstances in that case. As I explain above, they do not change the impacts of the proposal in this case or how I need to interpret the policies of the Framework.

Conclusions

16. I attribute substantial weight to the harm to the GB because of the development being inappropriate development, which should not be approved

¹ Purbeck District Design Guide, Supplementary Planning Document, adopted 14 January 2014

except in very special circumstances. In addition, the development results in conflict with one of the purposes of the Green Belt.

17. I give a moderate degree of weight to the positive economic advantages of the proposal including the support for this provided by LP Policy CO. However this and the other benefits are of insufficient weight individually or collectively to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. I therefore find that the other considerations in this case do not clearly outweigh the harm that I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist and the proposal would not comply with the Framework.

18. I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Andy Harwood

INSPECTOR