



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 July 2019

by Ian McHugh Dip TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1 August 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/F2605/W/19/3225820

Church Farm, Church Lane, Gressenhall, NR19 2QF

- 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 Mrs A Wilcox against the decision of Breckland Council.
 - The application Ref 3PL/2017/1475/F, dated 16 November 2017, was refused by notice dated 3 October 2018.
 - The development proposed is the change of use of land to camping site with shepherds huts, disabled pods, bell tents, tent pitches, internal road and parking areas, shower and toilet facilities, together with house and cart shed for the site warden, landscaping and access works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the countryside.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is a relatively large irregularly shaped agricultural grassed field, which is situated within open countryside, beyond the defined settlement and the built up area of the village. It is currently served by a field access from Church Lane. The Church Lane frontage of the site is substantially screened by hedging. Other boundaries are defined by a mixture of post and wire fencing and trees/hedges. The site slopes gently upwards from the site access. The appeal site and surrounding landscape have no special designation but, in my opinion, the field contributes to the rural setting of the village, with a strong visual and physical connection to the open countryside.
4. The proposal is to change the use of the field to a camping site. It would include shepherds huts, glamping pods, bell tents and tent pitches. These would be spread around the site and would be served by an internal access road that would be constructed alongside two sides of the site. A new access would be created onto Church Lane, close to the existing access point.
5. In addition, the proposal includes a detached dwelling and cart shed. The appellant states that the dwelling would be necessary to manage, supervise and provide security for users of the camp site.

6. The proposal has been the subject of a large number of comments from third parties. These include statements in support of, and in objection to, the development. In reaching my decision, I have taken these comments into account.
7. My attention has also been drawn to a recent proposal for a detached dwelling on the site, which was dismissed at appeal on 25 August 2017 (reference: APP/F2605/W/17/3175051). The Inspector concluded that the proposal would be harmful to the open character of the site and to the rural setting of the village. However, that proposal was not related to any other use of the land. Consequently, I accept that the current appeal proposal is materially different, because of the dwelling's connection with the camping use.
8. The proposal is supported by a business report, which concludes that the proposed camping site would be a sustainable and viable operation. It is also accompanied by a Site Development Assessment, prepared by Destination Research Ltd, which states (amongst other things) that the proposal would target a range of markets and would offer several unique selling points, including provision for disabled campers. I note that the occupancy rates have been revised upwards since the planning application was determined. The appellant's evidence also concludes that the camping uses would be dependent upon a high level of management supervision and, in that regard, the proposed dwelling would be necessary and justified. Furthermore, the appellant points to the economic benefits of the proposal, through increased spending in the village and by providing some local employment.
9. I accept that users of the camp site would potentially use local facilities in the village and nearby, although I did note at my site visit, that the village PH was closed. I have also taken into account the support from 'Visit East Anglia', which states that it is 'keen' to encourage more tourism in Breckland, as it lags significantly behind other parts of Norfolk.
10. My attention has been drawn to a recent grant of planning permission by the Council for a "large" storage building on a nearby site (reference: 3PL/2018/1126/F), which also lies outside of the defined settlement boundary. The Council considered that the economic benefits of the development outweighed the negative impacts. The appellant contends that the same conclusion should apply to the appeal proposal. I have already stated that there would be some economic benefits arising from the appeal proposal. However, these benefits must be balanced against other considerations. Furthermore, the evidence before me is that the recently approved development is connected to an existing employment site and, in that regard the development is not wholly comparable with the appeal proposal.
11. The appellant also states that there would be significant social benefits arising from the proposal, with particular reference to the provision of camping accommodation for disabled persons. In the appellant's view this reinforces the need for someone to live on the site, as the proposed dwelling would contain accommodation for a carer, if required.
12. Policy CP 11 of the Council's adopted Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Document (CS) seeks to protect the landscape of the District for its own intrinsic beauty. This is consistent with the provisions of paragraph 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (the Framework). The Council

- argues that the proposal would be a harmful encroachment into the countryside and, therefore, the proposal would conflict with Policy CP 11.
13. The Council accepts that the proposal would provide some economic and social benefits, which would accord with Policy DC 8 of the CS, even though it states that the facilities proposed as part of the development would not be totally unique. The Council's reasoning in relation to this matter is covered in some detail in its officer report and statement of case, and despite some comments to the contrary from third parties, I have no reason to disagree with the Council's conclusions. Furthermore, paragraph 83 of the Framework supports the creation of a prosperous rural economy, which includes sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments. However, this is tempered by a requirement to respect the character of the countryside.
 14. The Council also contends that there is insufficient justification for the proposed dwelling. It argues that the business could be supervised and managed remotely. Furthermore, it questions the viability of the proposal contained in the appellant's supporting business report, particularly in relation to the value of the land. In addition, it points to the camping site not yet being established and, in that regard, the proposal is considered to conflict with Policy CP 14 of the CS, which states (amongst other things) that new dwellings in the countryside will only be permitted where they are required in connection with an existing business. The proposed size of the dwelling is also questioned by the Council.
 15. Notwithstanding the conflicting evidence regarding the viability of the proposal, in my opinion, it would be unusual for planning permission to be granted in the countryside for a dwelling of permanent construction in connection with a fledgling business. Normal practice would dictate that a temporary form of accommodation would be considered for a specified period, to enable the business to demonstrate that it was viable and sustainable in the longer term. There is no reason why this should not apply to the appeal proposal. However, based on the evidence before me, I accept that there would be justification for some form of residential accommodation on the site to provide support and security, should the development be acceptable in all other respects.
 16. Both the appellant and the Council have referred to the Council's position in respect of housing land supply. Although the extent of the shortfall varies between the parties, I note that the previous Inspector dealt with this issue as part of the appeal decision referred to in paragraph 7 above. It was concluded that Policy CP 14 of the CS, which restricts new residential development outside of settlement boundaries, is a policy for the supply of housing and consequently, any conflict could only be given limited weight. I also agree that the site is not isolated and it is only a short walk into the village. In that regard, the proposal would contribute to the dwelling stock in the area (albeit in a minor way).
 17. Notwithstanding the above, I consider that the appeal falls to be determined largely on the impact of the development on the character and appearance of the countryside. I accept that the existing boundary hedging, coupled with the natural contours of the land and proposed landscaping, would mean that the appeal development would be largely screened from public view and there would be little impact on the wider landscape. I have also taken into account

the appellant's assertion that the proposed dwelling would reflect local architectural style.

18. However, the cumulative effect of the proposal (including the proposed dwelling) would, in my opinion, represent a significant and harmful encroachment into the open countryside. The appeal site is an integral part of the countryside setting of Gressenhall and there is clear physical and visual separation between the site and the built up area of the village. The proposed development would contain a range of different elements spread throughout the site, including permanent buildings, areas of hardstanding, the internal roadway, plus the new dwelling and cart shed. These elements, together with the presence of parked vehicles and other associated paraphernalia, would unacceptably result in the loss of the site's open character and it would be harmful to the rural setting of the village. Therefore, the proposal would conflict with Policy CP 11 of the CS.

Other Matters

19. The proposal has also raised a number of other issues. These are covered in detail in the Council's report. With regard to highway matters, I note that the Highway Authority did not object. In addition, no objections have been raised by the Council's formal consultees in respect of ecology, heritage, drainage or arboricultural matters. I have no reason to disagree with the conclusions of the consultees on these issues.

Planning Balance

20. I have considered the appeal proposal against the Development Plan and the three objectives of sustainable development, as defined in paragraph 8 of the Framework. I consider that the development would result in some economic and social benefits including increased spending in the locality, the creation of some employment and the provision of a tourist facility, plus facilities for the disabled. These aspects weigh in favour of the development.
21. However, I have also found that the proposal would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the site and to the rural setting of the village. I consider this harm to be substantial and to outweigh the benefits of the proposal.

Conclusion

22. For the reasons given above, it is concluded that the appeal should be dismissed.

Ian McHugh

INSPECTOR