



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 October 2019

by David Wyborn BSc(Hons) MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 November 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/19/3228746

Seaview Holiday Village, Polperro Road, West Looe PL13 2JE

- 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 Seaview Holiday Village Ltd against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA18/10688, dated 12 November 2018, was refused by notice dated 7 February 2019.
 - The development proposed is the extension and improvements to Seaview Holiday Village caravan park, comprising use of land for the siting of additional lodges/caravans (static caravans) for holiday use; access and parking, landscape planting and associated infrastructure.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the location within the Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

3. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. A similar approach to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB is set out in Policy 23 of the Cornwall Local Plan Strategic Policies 2010-2030 (the Local Plan) and Policy 1 of the Polperro and Lansallos Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan 2017-2030 (the Neighbourhood Plan).
4. Additionally, the Neighbourhood Plan makes specific reference to holiday villages that are located within the AONB, where it is said that the impact on the landscape is a particularly significant consideration. Policy 9 of the Neighbourhood Plan sets out the approach to holiday lodges and static caravans. The intention of the policy is to maintain the present status of holiday lodges and static caravans with regard to the areas of land that they cover and their absence of residential rights. Policy 9 states that proposals either to extend the existing areas of holiday villages or to replace lodges or static caravans with permanent housing will not be supported. The policy also states that measures to reduce the landscape and visual impact of existing holiday villages will be supported.

5. The wider site is a holiday village consisting mainly of chalets and static caravans with ancillary facilities and buildings, and is located within the AONB.
6. The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Landscape Character Study identifies the area as falling within Character Area 22 (South East Cornwall Plateau). The general area is broadly typical of the Character Area. The entrance to the site from the A387 lies on a ridge of land and, while some of the site is located on the adjoining reasonably level area, most of the caravans are sited on an approximately east facing slope of the hillside. The surrounding area has mainly small to medium-sized fields and a rolling pastoral landscape, interspersed with hedge and treed boundaries, with more woodland towards the bottom of the valley sides.
7. The planning history shows that in 2009, permission¹ was granted for the extension of the holiday village into the adjoining fields to allow for the repositioning of some of the units and additional landscaping. The description of the proposal states that there was to be no increase in the unit numbers. Forty units were shown to be sited beyond the then existing boundaries of the developed area of the holiday village.
8. The appellant argues that this earlier permission (08/01183/FUL) did not limit the numbers of units across the whole site and the additional units could be sited anywhere within the adjoining field. While I note this argument, this position has not been verified, for instance through a certificate application, and therefore I attribute it limited weight. Indeed, conditions related to this permission were discharged by the Council on 25 January 2012². This included the landscaping proposals and the accompanying plan shows the positioning of the units, with the planting of specimen trees and shrubs both in the areas associated with the main site and within the area where the caravans were extended into the adjoining land.
9. I noted on site that the caravans have been positioned in the areas of the adjoining land, it appeared in accordance with the landscaping plan, however, the planting of the specimen trees and shrubs as shown on the landscaping plan appeared not yet to have fully taken place.
10. The present proposal seeks to extend the caravans across wider sections of the site, mainly areas further down the slope of the hillside. A net increase of 47 units would result. An extensive landscaping scheme with structural planting, is proposed, based on a phasing plan, which it is said would conserve and enhance the landscape and additionally reduce the impact of the existing caravan site.
11. I have taken into account the detailed analysis and conclusions in the Landscape and Visual Assessment – Seaview Holiday Village (October 2018). From more distant locations, the topography of the land form would prevent many views of the site and, where this would be possible, the holiday village would be a small element in a more expansive landscape.

¹ Application No 08/01183/FUL – Improvements to existing holiday park involving inclusion of additional areas to allow for repositioning of units and new landscaping (no increase in unit numbers) and the installation of a septic tank – Seaview Holiday Village, Polperro Road, West Looe, Looe. Permission dated 20 February 2009.

² Application PA11/10256 – Submission of details to discharge conditions 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8 in respect of decision notice E2/08/01183/FUL.

12. The main impact of the holiday village is seen from across the valley, and from public views in the gaps in the hedged boundary of the associated road which leads approximately south from Sclerder Abbey. In these views (in particular viewpoints 18-21), the holiday village is clearly visible and appears as a discordant element in the landscape. The light colour, regular appearance and siting of the caravans is the main element that causes the harm. The existing landscaping within the main site helps to some extent to soften the impact of parts of this area, while the caravans which have been sited in the extended areas are prominent and appear exposed. However, in these extended areas the proposed planting is yet to fully take place and, therefore, in time the appearance of these caravans, while they would still in all likelihood be visible, would gradually be lessened as the approved landscaping scheme matures.
13. The proposal would extend the siting of caravans further down the slope. While the majority of the caravans would be obscured from views from across the valley by topography and woodland, the positioning of some of the additional caravans in the areas not so far down the slope would be visible. They would consolidate the appearance of the holiday village within the landscape, adding to the harm that already exists. The landscaping scheme proposed across the whole of the site with the present scheme would be much more extensive than the previous landscaping proposal. It would also incorporate areas of open and undeveloped space, planned as wildflower meadows, amongst the extended areas for the additional caravans.
14. However, the landscaping scheme would take time to mature and even in time, in all likelihood, the additional caravans, related parked cars and access roads, would be perceptible in part through the planting from across the valley such that the additional development would be apparent. Notwithstanding the phasing proposed, this extent and scale of development would not be able to be absorbed into the landscape without it appearing intrusive to the rural character of the valley. I do not consider the landscaping would deliver an overall beneficial effect in the longer term.
15. From within parts of the holiday park site there are some views down the valley to open land and countryside. The additional caravans, despite the accompanying landscaping and even with a sympathetic more muted and recessive colour and external finish, would add significantly to the developed feel to the site detracting from its rural character and appearance.
16. Taking all these matters into account, I am not satisfied that the extensive landscaping scheme, which is proposed across the site as a whole, would off-set the visual harm that would result from the significant extension of the site into open land. As a consequence, the scheme would not recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, or conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB. For these reasons, the proposal would not comply with the approach to development as set out in the Cornwall AONB Management Plan 2016 to 2021, because it would be a new tourism development that would not conserve and enhance the diverse local landscape characteristics of this section of the AONB.
17. In coming to this judgement, I have taken into account that the scheme has been amended and reduced in scale since an earlier submission and the appellant has met with and taken into account the advice of the Cornwall AONB Unit. I have also had regard to the detailed consultation response from the

Cornwall AONB Unit and, in particular, their acknowledgement of the longer term benefits of the landscaping and the structural planting.

18. While the scheme would result in an unacceptable adverse landscape impact, this would be limited to the adjoining valley area and would involve an extension to an existing holiday village rather than a stand alone development. In these circumstances, I consider that the impact of the nature, scale and setting of the proposal would be localised and therefore would not be major development within the meaning of paragraph 172 of the Framework.
19. In the light of the above analysis, I conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area, and in particular not conserve or enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB. As a consequence, the proposal would conflict with Policies 3 and 23 of the Local Plan and Policy 1 of the Neighbourhood Plan which require, amongst other things, that proposals in the AONB must conserve and enhance the landscape and natural beauty of the AONB and be appropriately located to address the AONB's sensitivity and capacity.
20. Additionally, while the scheme would provide measures to reduce landscape and visual impact of an existing holiday village, there would be a clear conflict with Policy 9 of the Neighbourhood Plan because the proposal would extend the existing area of the holiday village.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

21. The increase in the number of caravans would be a significant investment and help to maintain and increase employment on the site. The additional caravans are said to be the minimum necessary to make the site viable. The proposal would lead to a meaningful increase in visitor spend from the additional visitors. I have taken into account all the submissions regarding the importance of visitors and high quality accommodation to the Cornish economy, the high levels of occupancy at the site and the growing market for such accommodation, and the benefits the expanded site would bring to the local area. This investment into the tourist economy would be supported by Policy 5 of the Local Plan.
22. Policy 8 of the Neighbourhood Plan promotes economic development and the creation of jobs and income earning opportunities. However, this is on the basis the proposal is of an appropriate scale and would not detract from the appearance and character of their immediate neighbourhood. Given my findings above on the impact to the character and appearance of the area, the proposal would conflict with this policy when considered as a whole.
23. The Framework specifies that planning decisions should help to create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity. Furthermore, the Framework states the need to support a prosperous rural economy requires that decisions should enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.
24. Considering these matters together, the economic and tourism benefits which would flow from the development are clear and tangible. As a consequence, I attribute these benefits significant weight.

25. There would also be ecological benefits that would result from the increased planting and an increase in open space and recreation provision. I afford these matters moderate weight because the areas into which the development would extend are already open and verdant, with some access available for residents of the site.
26. I have also found that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area, and would fail to conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB. This is a matter to which, in accordance with the Framework, I attribute great weight. Given the extent of the development encroaching into undeveloped land and the form and appearance that would result, the harm would be significant. This would fail development plan policies concerning the AONB. I also attach substantial weight to the harm that would result from the conflict with Policy 9 of the Neighbourhood Plan which specifically states that the extension of the existing areas of holiday villages will not be supported.
27. Taking all these matters into account, the extensive landscaping scheme would not mitigate the adverse landscape impact to an acceptable extent, and the totality of harm would not outweigh the benefits. The proposal would not accord with the development plan when considered as a whole and there are no material considerations that outweigh the identified harm and the associated development plan conflict. Accordingly, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

David Wyborn

INSPECTOR