



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 May 2020

by David Wyborn BSc(Hons) MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 June 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/J9497/W/19/3242900

Land opposite Southcombe, Widecombe-in-the-Moor TQ13 7TA

- 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 D Faulkner against the decision of Dartmoor National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref 0310/19, dated 30 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 5 November 2019.
 - The development proposed is the erection of timber frame building for housing of horses and sheep.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the location of the development would accord with the development plan having particular regard to the effect on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The site lies within the Dartmoor National Park. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. Development Plan policies have a similar approach to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the National Park.
4. In relation to horse related development, Policy DMD33 of the Development Management and Delivery Development Plan Document (July 2013) (the DDP) indicates, amongst other criteria, that where new buildings are needed they are well-related to existing buildings and other local features. In relation to agricultural development, Policy DMD34 of the DDP requires, amongst other criteria, that the proposal relates well to local landscape features and other building groups.
5. The character of this area beyond the village is predominantly of grazing fields with few buildings and well established treed and hedged boundaries. There are occasional building groups sometimes around dwellings, such as Southcombe House. This largely undeveloped and verdant appearance of the area contributes positively to this section of the hillside and, in turn, the wider National Park landscape of this part of Dartmoor.

6. The proposed building would include accommodation for 3 stables with an end section for sheep and storage. The building would serve this 9 acre holding, which presently has no buildings, and would be set back from the road. The building would be located towards the lower corner of the field, cut into the slope and screened from wider view from across the valley by the boundary trees. However, the development would be in part visible from the road through the gateway and it would appear visually as an isolated development in this undeveloped corner of the field. While the impact would be localised, it would erode some of the positive contribution that this section of the field makes to the generally undeveloped character of this part of the National Park.
7. The relevant policies from the development plan require that equestrian and agricultural development is well related to existing buildings. In this case, the building would be separated from other buildings and appear as a sporadic development. It would not therefore accord with these policies and their locational approach to the siting of such development within the landscape.
8. I do understand the case made in support of the building, including regarding animal welfare, that the siting may minimise the potential for crime and that it would be of a size and design appropriate for the intended purpose. The barn would allow the stabling of the horses which are presently brought up to the site on the road. I have also noted the explanation that the proposal has been carefully considered, involving consultations with the local community and there are representations in support of the proposal including from local residents, the Widecombe Fair Committee and the Parish Council. However, these justifications and their benefits do not appear to be entirely site specific and could be advanced on other holdings of a similar size that are also without buildings. I am not satisfied that they are sufficient to outweigh the harm and conflict with the policies of the development plan that I have identified.
9. I have also noted the intentions to ensure that the land and traditional boundaries to the fields would be improved and be well maintained, and that having a building would contribute to these efforts such that overall the result would be positive to the character and appearance of the area. The appellant has indicated that a mitigation scheme could form part of any approval. However, the evidence does not clearly demonstrate that the benefits of good land management could only take place with a building on this site and therefore I attach limited weight to this matter.
10. The case is made that moving the barn closer to the road would address the policy issue in relation to grouping the building in the landscape but this would make it more visible. As a consequence, it is argued this helps to justify the proposed location. However, this alternative location is not the proposal before me and I have considered the scheme based on its merits. Therefore, the weight that I attach to this suggestion is limited.
11. Examples of other buildings in the area have been highlighted that are argued to be comparable and provide further justification for the proposal. The barn at Bonehill appears to be in the general vicinity of other buildings so could be considered reasonably well grouped and therefore accord with the development plan approach in this respect. The building described as Bowman barn is separated from other buildings and I have taken into account the influence it has on the general character and appearance of the area. I do not know the full planning history or whether the original building was considered under the

- present development plan policies. In all the circumstances, I am not persuaded by the evidence that this existing building demonstrates a clear justification for the appeal building which would be harmful for the reasons explained above.
12. The Widecombe Fair Field Barn is closer to the village than the appeal site and seen in some wider surroundings in broad association with parts of the built form of the village. It is readily apparent in the landscape. I am not satisfied that the evidence explains in detail how this scheme demonstrates best practice such that it provides a justification for the appeal building on a site further from the village and in the circumstances where the proposed building would not be grouped in association with another building.
 13. A recent application at Bowden Barn has also been highlighted. The information indicates that a further barn has been permitted to this site which also accommodates a dwelling and outbuildings and on an acreage similar to the appeal site. On the limited information before me it seems that the barn would have some proximity to the existing building group although the appellant argues that it would have an obvious visual impact and is further up the hillside. It seems to me that there are some differences, including the existence of existing buildings and therefore the compliance with policy in this case is a matter of judgement and the circumstances are not the same as in the present case.
 14. Taking all these examples of buildings into account, I am not satisfied that they materially add to the case in favour of the appeal scheme for the reasons I have explained. Consequently, I attribute these other examples limited weight in the overall considerations.
 15. Bringing all these matters together, there would be a clear conflict with the policies of the development plan in relation to the location of the building and harm in respect of the impact on the character and appearance of the area. While this harm to the area would be localised, the proposal, nevertheless, does not conserve or enhance the landscape of this part of the National Park, a matter which the Framework requires to be given great weight. The other matters including the benefits which have been set out in support of the proposal and the examples elsewhere are considerations which I have taken into account but they collectively carry moderate weight in the overall analysis.
 16. Accordingly, I conclude the proposal would be contrary to the development plan and there are no other material considerations to outweigh that finding. In particular, the proposal would not comply with Policies COR1, COR3 and COR4 of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2006-2026), Policies DMD1b, DMD5, DMD33, and DMD34 of the DDP, the Framework and the general approach in the English National Parks and the Broads UK Government Vision and Circular 2010 which seek, notably, that development will conserve and enhance the characteristic landscapes and features that contribute, in this case, to Dartmoor's special environmental qualities. As a consequence, the appeal should be dismissed.

David Wyborn

INSPECTOR