



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 July 2020

by Patrick Hanna MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 July 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/J4423/W/19/3243788

Little Intake Farm, Woodhead Road, Grenoside, Sheffield S35 8QD

- 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 Mark Boulby against the decision of Sheffield City Council.
 - The application Ref 17/03187/FUL, dated 27 July 2017, was refused by notice dated 25 November 2019.
 - The development proposed is change of use from grazing land to campsite and conversion of redundant agricultural buildings and construction of one building to provide associated facilities.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. An application for costs was made by Mr Mark Boulby against Sheffield City Council (the Council). This application is the subject of a separate Decision.
3. At the time of my site visit, some aspects of the development had already been carried out. Enforcement action has been commenced by the Council, and an appeal against the enforcement notice (Ref APP/J4423/C/20/3249273) has been made by the appellant, which will be the subject of a separate Decision.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to relevant development plan policies and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework);
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape;
 - the effect of the use of the proposal on the safety of road users using Woodhead Road; and
 - would the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Inappropriate development

5. Policy CS71 of the Sheffield Development Framework Core Strategy (2009)(CS), policies GE1, GE2 and GE4 of the Sheffield Unitary Development Plan (1998)(UDP) and the Framework together identify that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, and that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
6. Paragraph 146 of the Framework states that certain forms of development are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. One of the identified forms includes material changes in the use of land, such as the proposed recreational use as a caravan and campsite. In carrying out this assessment, openness of the Green Belt has a spatial aspect as well as a visual aspect.
7. Spatially, the siting of caravans and tents may to some extent be intermittent. However, the large extent of area over which they would be sited within the existing clearing, throughout what is likely to be a significant proportion of the year, would have a negative effect on the permanent openness of the Green Belt. The very presence of the caravans and tents in a part of the appeal site where there are currently no structures would result in an intrusion, notwithstanding that this effect may be intermittent. The fact that the proposal would be in a woodland clearing with screen landscaping surrounding it, and distant from the public road, does not affect the concept of spatial openness.
8. In any case, in visual terms, the extensive public access network in the surrounding area appears to be well used, based on the walkers, cyclists and horse riders I saw during my site visit. Furthermore, the public footpaths across the appeal site itself are clearly signposted and well-trodden. This indicates to me that, despite the relatively secluded location, sensitivity to change at the appeal site would be high. The proposed caravans and campsite would be plainly visible from the public footpath running through the centre of the site in an easterly-westerly direction; from the woodland road within Stead Spring through a wide gap in the trees at the access point; and from along the footpath on the eastern periphery of the site.
9. The effect of this would be to introduce a form of development that, despite not being of urban form or adjacent to an existing settlement, nonetheless encroaches into the otherwise open countryside. Whilst the proposal includes a fifteen-metre wide landscaping strip, this would only offer screening from some of the affected public footpaths, which would not, to my mind, adequately mitigate the visual impact of the proposal.
10. The scheme is principally based upon the change of use to caravan and campsite which, for the above reasons, would cause harm to openness. Therefore, in assessing the development as a whole, it is not necessary for me to reach any conclusions on the inappropriateness or otherwise of other individual elements of the scheme that support the proposed use, including the managers accommodation, children's play barn and amenity block.
11. I find that the proposal would not keep the land permanently open. In doing so, the scheme fails to safeguard the countryside from encroachment, one of

the five purposes of the Green Belt. I therefore conclude that the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and, as such, conflicts with policy CS71 of the CS, policies GE1, GE2 and GE4 of the UDP, and the Framework.

Character and appearance

12. The appeal site consists of two fields used as grazing land, of undulating landform and with associated farm buildings, enclosed by mature woodland, which together provide the site's agricultural character as part of the wider rural landscape and open countryside. The character of the site and surrounding area is also further defined as a popular area for walking, cycling and horse riding. Policy GE8 of the UDP requires that development must protect, and wherever appropriate, enhance the character and appearance of Areas of High Landscape Value (AHL). The AHL is defined as an area of countryside which is 'very attractive and which has special character'.
13. It seems to me that it is these open landscapes and mature woodlands, along with the limited extent of built development, that provides the attractive character and appearance of the area and the draw, at least in part, for visitors to this valued local landscape. The appellant accepts that a caravan and campsite would change the character of the site from grazing land but suggests that limited grazing would resume during quieter winter months. However, even in the absence of caravans, the residual network of grasscrete tracks, electric points and standpipes would not, to my mind, protect the attractive character of the area. The resumption of limited grazing would not restore the character of the site as open agricultural land. That some recreational visitors to the wider area may use the proposed recreational facilities does not make the development in keeping with the character and appearance of the area.
14. As such, the character and appearance of the proposal would be incongruous with the intrinsic character of the surrounding open countryside, and very visibly so from the network of public paths. I conclude that the proposed development would have a significant adverse effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape, contrary to the above policy.

Highway safety

15. Access to the appeal site is taken from a shared access with an existing car park, which serves recreational visitors to the surrounding network of public access routes. The reason for refusal refers to the slow movement of caravans, fast traffic, and poor visibility. In submissions, the Council expand upon this, stating that it is when the car park is busy and overflowing onto the verges of the public road that caravans may have difficulty safely pulling out from the site into fast moving traffic.
16. There is some logic in this argument, however in reality it is also the case that reasonable drivers will, when approaching vehicles parked on the side of the road, slow down and proceed with caution. Drivers would have clear visibility, for a considerable distance along this straight and uninterrupted stretch of road, of slow-moving vehicles emerging from the access, and would have opportunity to react appropriately. Similarly, caravan drivers would also have clear visibility of oncoming traffic and could wait accordingly. Finally, that drivers, cyclists and walkers would have to negotiate each other when manoeuvring within the carpark is a normal occurrence in any car park.

17. A detailed Transport Statement (TS) has been produced by the appellant's transport consultants, indicating that there is no data of accidents at this junction, and this is not contested by the Council. The TS concludes that the proposed traffic movements would not have an adverse affect upon the existing highway network. Given my own observations on site, I see no evidence to persuade me that I should disagree with the TS.
18. Accordingly, I find that the proposal would not have an unacceptable effect on the safety of road users using Woodhead Road, and would not conflict with paragraphs 108 and 109 of the Framework. These require that a safe and suitable access to the site be achieved, without unacceptable impacts on highway safety or severe residual cumulative impacts on the road network.

Other considerations

19. The proposal would bring tourism and economic benefits to the local area, regardless of any perceived lack of similar facilities. I note the previous temporary use as a campsite during the Tour de France, as well as the potential for improved variety of experience for visitors to the region, increased spend in the area, local job creation, and indirect benefits to local businesses. Taking comments from industry bodies into account, I give these matters significant weight in support of the proposal.
20. I am aware that permission was previously granted in 2014 by the Council for a similar development at the appeal site, and concerns have been raised in terms of consistency of decision making. I have not been provided with full details of the previous permission but, nonetheless, it has now expired, regardless of the circumstances of it doing so. As such, there is no material fallback position to rely on, notwithstanding that the policy position remains the same now as then. Consequently, in determining this s78 appeal, I am required to assess the proposal on its merits, and I can only give this matter limited weight.
21. The appellant suggests that the Council's policy framework does not give enough support to this form of tourism development. However, this is a matter most appropriately addressed through the consultation and examination process of any new development plan. Furthermore, the Council do not object to the proposal on these specific grounds. The proposal incorporates features to operate sustainably and minimise reliance on services, however carbon reduction measures are a normal requirement for new developments, particularly when remotely located. Mitigation measures are proposed in respect of species and habitats across the site, but there is no evidence of net biodiversity gain. Emergency assistance for injured mountain bikers would be potentially closer to hand, which would result in a minor benefit from the proposal, as would the intention to run events that would support healthy lifestyles. These matters also attract limited weight.

Other matters

22. The opportunity to tap into rural growth programme grants is not a matter to which I can afford any weight in determining this s78 appeal, nor is any illegal use of the site or adjacent countryside for caravanning, camping, fly tipping or raves. The prospect for success of the Council's current enforcement action, currently subject to separate appeal, is not a matter for consideration as part of this appeal, nor is the handling of the planning application by the Council and any associated financial loss.

Conclusion

23. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. In addition there are adverse impacts on openness, the Green Belt purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, and character and appearance of the area. The lack of highway harm is of neutral weight. Substantial weight should be given to the harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other considerations.
24. As outlined above, I give significant and limited weights to the other considerations. However, even when taken together, these considerations do not outweigh the harm that the proposed development would cause. The substantial weight to be given to Green Belt harm is not clearly outweighed by the other considerations sufficient to demonstrate very special circumstances.
25. Therefore, for the reasons given and having had regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed and planning permission is refused.

Patrick Hanna

INSPECTOR