



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 July 2020

by R Morgan MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/W/20/3248671

Former greenkeeper's shed, Former Gorstyhill Golf Club, Abbey Park Way, Weston, Crewe CW2 5SQ

- 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 Haddon Property Developments Ltd against the decision of Cheshire East Council.
 - The application Ref 19/1360N, dated 1 March 2019, was refused by notice dated 12 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is change of use of the former greenkeeper's shed to B8 (storage and distribution) with associated landscaping and hardstanding, provision of access from the A531 and closure of vehicular access from Abbey Park Way.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. I have used the description of development which appears in the Council's decision notice and appeal form, which more fully describes the proposal than that used on the application form.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located within the Wychwood Park and Village area, which comprises of clusters of houses and a hotel, set within large areas of open space, with a country park and two golf courses. This area has a parkland quality and the estate roads, hotel and other golf infrastructure also contribute to the feeling of an engineered landscape. Nonetheless, the area has an open and green character, and the closure of the northern golf course in 2013 means that the area around the appeal site is becoming more naturalised.
5. The former greenkeeper's shed is located within a strip of land between the former northern golf course and Newcastle Road (A531). The section of Newcastle Road which passes in front of the appeal site is bounded by trees and tall hedgerow on both sides, becoming more open with views across the southern golf course on the approach to the roundabout with Abbey Park Way. Although it is a busy main road, the land on either side of the A531 appears

- green and undeveloped, and the trees and hedgerow vegetation in front of the appeal site contributes positively to the character of the area.
6. Following the closure of the golf course, the appeal building is no longer being used for its original purpose. The site is within the open countryside and Policy PG6 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2017 (CELPs) allows for the reuse of rural buildings. The Policy makes clear, however, that acceptability of such development will be subject to compliance with other relevant policies, with particular regard to be paid to design and landscape character, so the appearance and distinctiveness of the countryside is preserved and enhanced.
 7. Whilst no changes are proposed to the building itself, the proposal would involve the formation of an access onto Newcastle Road and the provision of additional hardstanding around the building. Creation of the new access and visibility splays, which would need to be large enough to cater for HGVs, would involve removing and cutting back of a section of hedgerow vegetation. There is already a gap in the hedgerow in this location, but this would need to be increased. Newcastle Road is a fast road, so views of the site from vehicles are short in duration, but the proposed access would nonetheless significantly erode the rural character of this section of road.
 8. The hedges were regularly cut back when the golf course was in use and there is nothing to prevent this happening in the future. However, even if this happened, it would not entail the removal of hedgerow and cutting back to the extent necessary to provide visibility splays.
 9. The creation of the new access would also result in more open views into the site from the road. Some hardstanding exists between the building and the access track, but much of the site is open grassland, with some shrubs and trees. Although no outside storage is proposed, the replacement of existing grassed areas around the sides of the building with considerable areas of hardstanding would change the character of the site and make it appear more urban.
 10. The activities around the building would also be more visible from the road, and although the number of HGVs on the site is likely to be small, their presence would be visible despite the existing and proposed additional planting. Overall, the site would appear as a more industrial use which would appear out of character in this countryside location.
 11. Planning permission has previously been granted for an access to the building from Newcastle Road, in connection with the previous use of the building as a greenkeeper's shed¹. Although the access was never completed, I note the Council's confirmation that the permission has been implemented and is therefore extant. However, that access was smaller than the one now proposed, requiring less hedgerow to be removed, and was not associated with other changes to the area around the building now proposed. Even if the access was constructed as permitted, therefore, it would not result in the degree of harm to the character of the area which would be associated with the appeal proposal.
 12. Despite shrubs and other vegetation now present, the former golf course remains generally open in character, enabling views across to the appeal

¹ Application ref P05/0141

building from some distance away. The site can be seen from public vantage points on Abbey Park Way, a public footpath on the former golf course and the residential development at Wychwood Village. From these viewpoints, large HGVs would be visible on the site and would appear alien in this green and open landscape. A narrow strip of hedgerow planting is proposed along the northern boundary of the site in front of the two proposed HGV parking bays, but this would take some time to become established, and in any event would only provide partial screening of the high vehicles.

13. CELPS Policy EG2 is concerned with the rural economy. Criterion 3 of the Policy is supportive of the expansion of existing businesses through the conversion of existing buildings. However, to my mind this point is concerned with existing businesses on a site and is therefore not directly applicable to the appeal proposal.
14. The proposal would have the potential to provide for some local employment opportunities, which is an objective of Policy EG2. However, the extent of such employment is unclear. Furthermore, support for development through Policy EG2 is subject to a number of criteria, which include the requirement that development is consistent in scale with its location and does not adversely affect the surrounding area or detract from residential amenity. The proposal would be of moderate scale and would be sufficiently far from the nearest houses to have a detrimental impact on amenity, but it would have an unacceptable effect on the surrounding area.
15. Policy E3 of the Weston & Basford Neighbourhood Plan 2017 (WBNP) supports the re-use of rural buildings for small business provided that the proposed use is appropriate to a rural location and respects the character of the local area. In this case, the introduction of a storage and distribution use with its associated activities on the site would be an alien use within this location which is characterised by residential and recreation uses and has been developed in accordance with a specific vision.
16. I note comments by interested parties that, despite the golf course no longer being open, the appellant still has an obligation to maintain the land, and so the building is still required. Whilst the appellant has confirmed that maintenance is being undertaken by an off-site contractor, a future use of the building in connection with its original use cannot be ruled out.
17. I conclude that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with CELPS Policy SD2 and EG2 and WBNP Policies E1 and E3, which require that new development, including proposals for the reuse of rural buildings and new small employment proposals, contributes positively to an area's character and identity, and does not adversely affect the surrounding area. There is further conflict with WBNP Policy LC3 which seeks to protect trees and hedgerows where these contribute to the character and amenity of the plan area.
18. The Council has also referred to CELPS Policy PG2, but as its provisions are primarily concerned with growth and investment within settlements, it is of limited relevance to this appeal.

Other Matters

19. The proposal would not undermine the delivery of strategic allocations, and the site is supported by existing infrastructure and is accessible by public transport. The Council's highways officer has raised no concerns about the ability of the highway network to accommodate the additional traffic. These matters are neutral in the planning balance.
20. In terms of benefits of the scheme, the proposal would make a small contribution towards the borough's employment land. In addition, an existing access track, which connects the greenkeepers shed to Abbey Park Way, would be closed to vehicles and would be used as a pedestrian access to the bus stop on Newcastle Road. However, these matters are not sufficient to overcome the harm to the character of the area which I have identified.
21. Objections to the proposal have been made by a large number of local residents, who are concerned about the effect of the proposal on the area. In particular, suggestions have been made that the proposal would contravene the provisions of legal agreements which include, amongst other matters, limits on future development of the Wychwood Park and Village area, and the use and maintenance of the country park. I note the concerns raised, but as I have dismissed the appeal on other grounds, I have not addressed these particular matters any further in this decision.

Conclusion

22. Material considerations do not indicate that I should conclude other than in accordance with the development plan as a whole. I therefore conclude that the appeal be dismissed.

R Morgan

INSPECTOR