
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 September 2020

by Guy Davies BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/20/3248751

Land at farm between Forest Mead and Stonefield, Linchmere Common Road, Linchmere GU27 3NE

- 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 & Mrs Powell against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref SDNP/19/05107/FUL, dated 13 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 21 January 2020.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a building for use as 2 holiday lets with associated parking and gardens and ancillary store following removal of two existing outbuildings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The appellant has submitted three revised plans with the appeal: D100, D300 (1/2) and D300 (2/2). These show minor changes to the fenestration and external materials of the proposed residential building. As the changes are relatively small, I do not consider interested parties would be prejudiced by this substitution and I have taken them into account in my decision.
3. I note that Linchmere is spelt both as 'Linchmere' and 'Lynchmere' in documents and in third party representations. I have used the former spelling throughout.
4. The Council has incorrectly referred to the South Downs Local Plan as 'emerging' in its decision notice and statement. The South Downs Local Plan was adopted on 2 July 2019 and forms part of the Development Plan for the area. I have given it full weight in my decision.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:
 - The effect on the landscape of the South Downs National Park
 - Whether the site is in a suitable location for holiday lets having regard to the settlement strategy and accessibility to local services
 - The living conditions of neighbouring occupants at Forest Mead and Stonefield by reason of noise and disturbance.

Reason

Landscape

6. The site lies within the South Downs National Park. The purposes of the National Park are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area, and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public. Where there is conflict between these purposes, the first purpose takes priority. There is also a duty to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park.
7. Paragraph 172 of the National Planning Policy Framework advises 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.
8. The appeal site lies in a secluded part of the countryside. Although there is a scattering of houses in extensive grounds in the immediate area, the countryside retains a rural character and appearance. The landscape is made up of small fields and woods on the edge of wooded common land. Boundaries are typically field hedges interspersed with field trees. Farmland is generally laid to grass. The existing site exhibits many of these features and contributes towards the rural character and appearance of the landscape.
9. The introduction of a residential use, with all of the domestic paraphernalia that goes with that, would interrupt the secluded and undeveloped appearance of the site and erode its rural character. The proposed building would, in my view, have the appearance of a pair of semi-detached suburban bungalows, at odds with its rural setting. I acknowledge that there are limited views of the site given its secluded location, but the development would still be seen from surrounding land and in glimpsed views from the local footpath network. Activities associated with the use would also be apparent in the surrounding area, reducing the tranquillity and sense of remoteness of this part of the National Park.
10. The appellant argues that as holiday lets, the units would not have the same domesticating effect on the site as permanently occupied dwellings. I disagree. Visitors using the accommodation would reasonably expect to enjoy the surroundings, including the associated gardens, which would therefore need to have patios, outdoor seating and associated domestic equipment. They would, to all intents and purposes, be perceived as permanent dwellings. In addition, the site plan shows a machinery store and gravelled parking areas, which would further add to the domestication of the site.
11. The revised plans submitted with the appeal change the external materials of the main building to timber cladding on the elevations and tiles on the roof. While this would be an improvement to the utilitarian materials originally proposed, the form of the building with a wide span, extensive fenestration and shallow pitched roof would still appear suburban in nature and uncharacteristic of the vernacular buildings in this part of the National Park.
12. The development would result in the removal of the existing barn and timber shed. I consider this would be of limited benefit to the landscape as, while it would remove buildings from the site, the agricultural appearance and use of

the existing buildings are compatible with the character of the area and therefore do not cause harm in the same way that a domestic building and residential use of the site would.

13. I conclude that the development would fail to conserve and enhance the landscape and natural beauty of the South Downs National Park. As a result of the harm to the landscape qualities of the National Park, the development would also conflict with Policies SD1 and SD5 of the South Downs Local Plan, which require new development to meet the objectives of the National Park and respect local landscape character.

Suitable location

14. The South Downs Local Plan spatial strategy directs the majority of new development to defined settlements, with restrictions on development outside those areas, in particular where it would have an adverse impact on the landscape qualities of the National Park.
15. Outside settlement boundaries, land is treated as open countryside. Settlements that are more scattered or diffuse in their form are treated as open countryside for the purposes of the Plan. This strategic approach to the location of new development is supported by paragraph 79 of the Framework which advises that planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside, other than in specified circumstances, none of which apply in this case.
16. Policy SD23 guides the development of sustainable tourism, including visitor accommodation, subject to a number of criteria. These include that the location of development minimises the need for travel by private car, and where proposals are located outside settlement boundaries they positively contribute to the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park, and are closely associated with other attractions/established tourism uses or are part of farm diversification schemes.
17. The site lies in an isolated location outside any settlement boundary as defined in the Plan. Residential development on the site would erode its rural character and appearance, with a consequent adverse impact on the landscape qualities of the National Park, for the reasons set out in the first issue above. The site is also isolated from facilities and services, such that almost all trips to and from the site are likely to be by private motor car. I note from the representations that the local bus service has stopped, leaving no alternative public means of transport. The proposed development would not be associated with any established tourism use or wider farm diversification scheme.
18. Having regard to all these factors, I conclude that the location of the site would not be suitable for holiday accommodation because it would conflict with the spatial strategy of the South Downs Local Plan and be reliant on the need for travel by private car, contrary to Policies SD1, SD4, SD5, SD7 and SD23 of the South Downs Local Plan, which seek to protect the landscape qualities and tranquillity of the South Downs National Park, and ensure development is accessibly located.

Living conditions

19. Access to the site is along an unmade track from the road. The track runs through a broad grassed strip which separates it from residential properties on

either side. Screening is provided by mature hedges and trees along both boundaries.

20. Although the development would be likely to give rise to an increase in traffic, given the separation of the access track from the neighbouring properties and the good level of boundary screening, the amount of movements associated with two holiday lets would not in my view result in an unacceptable degree of disturbance to them.
21. I conclude that no harm would be caused to the living conditions of neighbouring occupants at Forest Mead or Stonefield by reason of noise or disturbance. The development would therefore comply with Policy SD5 of the South Downs Local Plan in so far as that policy requires new development to avoid having a harmful impact on surrounding uses and amenities.

Other Matters

22. The Linchmere Conservation Area abuts the appeal site to the west and on either side of the access. All these boundaries are well screened by hedges and trees. The Council has not raised the impact of the development on the setting of the Conservation Area as an issue. Having regard to the level of screening I see no reason to do so either.
23. The appellant has drawn attention to planning history on land between The Vicarage and Forest Mead, where permission has been granted for the conversion of a barn and stables to a holiday let, and more recently to a residential dwelling, the latter following an appeal. I distinguish these permissions from the appeal proposal in that it relates to the conversion of an existing building, to which Development Plan policies and national policies apply different criteria to those applying to new build development. The circumstances are not the same and I therefore give these decisions limited weight.

Conclusion

24. While I consider that the living conditions of neighbouring properties would not be harmed, I consider that harm would be caused to the landscape and natural beauty of the South Downs National Park and that the site would be an unsuitable location for the development because of conflict with the spatial strategy of the South Downs Local Plan and the lack of accessibility. This harm outweighs the limited benefit to the landscape from the removal of the existing buildings on the site. It also takes priority over promoting the opportunity for enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.
25. I therefore conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

Guy Davies

INSPECTOR