



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 September 2020

by Ben Plenty BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/J1860/W/20/3254291

**Lower Lightwood Farm, Elgar Coaches, Lightwood Lane, Cotheridge
WR6 5LT**

- 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 B Burgoyne against the decision of Malvern Hills District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00887/FUL, dated 13 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 21 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is replacement of coach depot maintenance building with associated landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. The Council has confirmed that the appellant's revised Flood Risk and Surface Water Strategy (June 2020) has addressed its concerns, subject to an appropriately worded condition, with respect to reason for refusal two. This matter is therefore no longer in dispute between the main parties. As I have no compelling evidence to disagree with this position, I will consider that this issue has been addressed.
3. The submitted location plan is somewhat confusing as the annotations for the proposed elevations do not align with the block plan. However, it is clear to me that the block plan shows that the proposed building would have two doorways opening towards the inner courtyard. These plans also show a roof arrangement that would place two conjoined gable ends facing both the courtyard and highway. As such, the proposed elevations are incorrectly labelled, but the block plan sufficiently clarifies the ambiguity.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed building on the local distinctiveness, character and appearance of the surrounding countryside.

Reasons

5. The appeal site and neighbouring development consists of a small cluster of buildings within the open countryside. This group consists of the appeal site and three dwellings around its perimeter. These dwellings include a two and three-storey semi-detached pair of dwellings to the south, being Walnut

Cottage and Northways and a bungalow to the rear of the site. The appeal site itself consists of three principal buildings, two are storage depots/garages and the third is an office block. On my visit I noted several coaches were parked within the central compound between the three buildings. Views into the site, from the south, are mostly screened by Walnut Cottage and Northways and trees along the southern boundary. However, views to the front of the site and to the north are largely exposed revealing the commercial nature of the site to wider views. The site makes a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

6. The Council's Landscape Character Assessment identifies that the local distinctiveness of the site results from its rural setting within the Principled Timbered Farmlands. This area consists of small scale wooded and agricultural landscape with filtered views through densely scattered hedgerow trees. This affords the local area a degree of local distinctiveness that contributes to the local rural character. This analysis also accords with my observations of the local area with some roadside views providing distant views of the wider countryside. The landscape to the north gradually climbs. This results in fields to the north providing wide views of the site, its surroundings and the Malvern Hills beyond.
7. The existing Dutch barn is clad in corrugated metal sheeting. This building is set back from the highway behind a post and rail fence, over rough ground. Views looking north through the frontage of the site take in the distant countryside due to the open and low-level nature of both the front and northern site boundaries. The existing building is relatively pronounced in this context. It is exposed to views from both the highway and longer views such as the footpath to the north (no. 513C) across the adjacent fields. However, despite its exposed location, the existing building is a relatively complementary component in the landscape due to its limited scale and agrarian appearance. Furthermore, being set back from the country lane it provides a beneficial sense of spaciousness between the built form and the highway.
8. The proposal would result in the replacement of the frontage building with a substantially larger industrial unit. This would be both wider and closer to the highway than the existing building. Furthermore, only a limited gap would be retained between the rear of the proposal and the highway. Therefore, the proposed building would be located on an exposed and prominent location. Its south and rear elevations would be highly prominent additions to views of the country lane. This effect would be an overt intrusion that would harm the open and rural character of the existing more subdued frontage. Accordingly, the proximity of the proposed building to the highway, in combination with its scale, would result in a prominent and harmful addition to the streetscene. Also, the space retained in between the building and highway would limit the capability of providing mitigating screening. Consequently, the proposed roadside planting would not adequately screen the building or meaningfully reduce its visual impact. Furthermore, any such proposed plant screen would have to be of such a scale that it would be out of character with the currently spacious and open setting of the existing frontage and distant views through the site.
9. Turning to the impact on wider views, the mass and height of the proposal would be clearly evident from the footpath to the north of the site due to limited intervening field boundary screening. The proposal would expand the

mass of built form on site. This would emphasise the presence of the commercial buildings in this rural setting. The wider views of the site from the footpath and its surroundings would therefore also be significantly harmed by the proposal.

10. The proposed building would therefore harm local distinctiveness and have a demonstrably harmful impact on the character and appearance on the surrounding countryside.
11. Accordingly, the proposal would be contrary to policies SWDP 8, SWDP 21 and SWDP 25 of the South Worcestershire Development Plan (2016). These seek, amongst other things, for employment uses to be supported provided it is of a scale appropriate for its location, for development to integrate effectively with its surroundings and the character of its landscape setting. Furthermore, the proposal would also be contrary to policy SWDP 12C which only provides support for the expansion of existing employment sites in rural areas where it has been demonstrated that intensification of the existing use is not viable. The proposal would also be contrary to policy P7 of the Broadwas and Cotheridge Neighbourhood Development Plan 2018-2030 (2019). This policy includes seeking to support employment related development that would have no significant adverse effects on the landscape.

Other matters

12. The site gained planning permission in 1999 for the parking of public service vehicles and their maintenance. This is therefore an established business in a rural location. The appellant explains that the proposal would allow the business to consolidate its activities and support the business growing. The appellant also explains that the existing Dutch barn does not meet current needs, is in poor repair and causes problems for manoeuvring vehicles. However, it is not adequately explained how manoeuvring would be improved or why repair of the building would be less viable than the costs associated with the proposal. Therefore, although the appellant asserts that policy SWDP 12C provides support for the scheme, the business case made is unconvincing. Accordingly, the social and economic benefits are of limited weight in favour of the proposal.

Conclusion

13. For the above reasons the appeal does not succeed.

Ben Plenty

INSPECTOR