



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 October 2020

by Rachael Pipkin BA (Hons) MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5th November 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/M1710/W/20/3256492

Brant Storage & Removals, Basingstoke Road, Alton GU34 4BH

- 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 T Brant-Coles of Brant Storage & Removals against the decision of East Hampshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 58585, dated 24 January 2020, was refused by notice dated 20 March 2020.
 - The development proposed is change of use of existing land to B8 usage – storage area – predominantly caravan/motorhome storage and associated storage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. At the time of my site visit, I observed that there were a small number of caravans being stored on the site. I am therefore considering this appeal as partly retrospective.
3. The lawfulness of the main Brant Storage & Removals business on the wider site is the subject of a separate planning application¹. I have not taken the status of this use into account in assessing the appeal proposal before me.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether or not the location is suitable for the expansion of a commercial business activity, having regard to local policy for countryside development; and
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Suitable location

5. The appeal site is located a short distance outside both Alton and the village of Beech, beyond the defined settlement policy boundary and within the countryside. The appeal relates to the use of the northern part of an open field,

¹ Council Ref 58585/002

- indicated to be 1.26 hectares, adjacent to a small cluster of development comprising light industrial and retail buildings where the existing storage business is located. The proposed development is to expand the existing storage business to provide open storage for caravans and motorhomes.
6. Policy CP19 of the East Hampshire District Local Plan: Joint Core Strategy 2014 (JCS) sets out that a policy of general restraint will operate in order to protect the countryside for its own sake. The only development allowed in the countryside will be that with a genuine and proven need for a countryside location. Policy CP6 of the JCS allows for the reasonable extension of existing firms in the countryside provided it would not harm the character of the site or its surroundings.
 7. The proposed use would require a large area of land due to the size and bulky nature of caravans and motorhomes. Whilst sufficient land for this purpose may not be available or affordable within the existing settlement policy boundaries, I have not been provided with substantive evidence to demonstrate that this is the case nor that other alternative sites have been considered. In the absence of this, I am not satisfied that the use of this open field in the countryside for storage purposes has been justified.
 8. The demand for storage of large leisure vehicles is not disputed. However, the appellant has not demonstrated that there is a genuine and proven need to meet this demand in a countryside location.
 9. The proposed development would occupy a sizeable area of land that would be significantly larger than that occupied by the existing buildings used by the business. Whilst the area of land required to enable the business to expand in line with its business need may need to be the size it is, for the reasons I have already set out the countryside location has not been justified.
 10. I conclude that the location would not be a suitable location for the expansion of a commercial business activity, having regard to local policy for countryside development. It would therefore conflict with Policies CP6 and CP19 of the JCS and Policy IB3 of the East Hampshire District Local Plan: Second Review 2006 (Local Plan). These policies together seek to protect the countryside for its own sake, resist development in a rural location that is not essential and permit the reasonable extension of existing firms subject to its effect on character.

Character and appearance

11. The appeal site forms part of an open field within a gently sloping rural landscape of fields and woodland. This landscape is characteristic of the Four Marks Clay Plateau area as set out in the Council's East Hampshire District Landscape Character Assessment 2006. The A339 runs along the site's eastern boundary from which the site, in its elevated position, is visible through gaps in the boundary tree coverage. The existing cluster of development and car parking has introduced a more urban form of development into the landscape immediately adjacent to the A339. However, the surrounding undeveloped landscape including the appeal site has maintained its attractive, open and rural character.
12. An area of bunding and planting runs along the northern side of the appeal site. The submitted drawings indicate that a further line of bunding would be formed. This would subdivide the field leaving the southern part of the field

- open and undeveloped. This bunding would provide some screening of the northern part of the field and the area to be used for storage. It would reduce views into the site from the A339. However, due to the sloping nature of the site and its elevated position, the stored vehicles due to their large size would nonetheless remain visible and intrusive within the landscape. The bulkiness of these vehicles parked up within the rural landscape on a permanent basis would have an urbanising effect which would detract from and significantly harm the attractive rural landscape. Furthermore, the formation of bunding whilst providing screening, would erode the open character of the landscape
13. No details have been provided about how many vehicles could be stored on the site, however, given the large size of the site it appears that this could be numerous. This would add to the harm that would arise. Even if covered in a green coloured cover which would make the vehicles less stark and obtrusive within the landscape, they would nevertheless be visually prominent due to both the size of the site and bulkiness of the vehicles.
14. Whilst the site is used for car boot sales and classic car meetings which would have a visual impact on the area, these are not permanent or continuous uses. As such they are not comparable to the appeal proposal which seeks to permanently utilise the site for storage purposes with a consequent more permanent urbanising effect on the rural landscape.
15. I conclude that the proposed development would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with Policies CP6, CP20 and CP29 of the JCS and Policy IB3 of the Local Plan which together seek development that does not harm the character or appearance of the site or the countryside, protects and enhances local distinctiveness and makes a positive contribution to the overall appearance of the area. It would also not accord with the National Planning Policy Framework's objectives of supporting development that recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and are sympathetic to local character.

Other Matters

16. The expansion of this local business has the potential to create a few extra jobs for local people. In addition, the site is well-located to nearby settlements. It would utilise an existing access conveniently accessible from the A339 rather than from narrow country lanes less well-suited to large leisure vehicles. In addition, co-located businesses have indicated support due to the increased visits to the site which may support their own businesses. These are positive aspects of the scheme which weigh in its favour. They would not however outweigh the harms I have identified.
17. The proposal would not affect wildlife, cultural heritage or opportunities for recreation. It would also not affect neighbouring occupiers. These are neutral factors in the balance.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons set out above, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Rachael Pipkin

INSPECTOR