



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 14 December 2020

by Mr Ben Plenty BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Y2810/W/20/3258382

Land adjacent to Brixworth Country Park, Pitsford Water, NN6 9DG

- 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 Dr Dallas Burston against the decision of Daventry District Council.
 - The application Ref DA/2018/0565, dated 27 June 2018, was refused by notice dated 6 July 2020.
 - The development proposed is Change of use from agricultural land for the purposes of a touring caravan site, erection of an amenities building, car parking and roadways.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the setting of Brixworth Country Park and Pitsford Reservoir; a Site of Special Scientific Importance (SSSI).

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The development plan for the district includes the Settlements and Countryside Local Plan (Part 2) for Daventry District 2011-2029 (LP). Policy RA6 of the LP is concerned with development in the open countryside. Criterium viii states that development will only be supported for tourism use that is of an appropriate scale for its location and has no significant adverse impact on its character, beauty and tranquillity.
4. The appeal site is to the south of the village of Brixworth. It is adjacent to the Brixworth Country Park which in turn is adjacent to Pitsford Reservoir SSSI. The site is also alongside the A508. The site consists of two linear fields that join at a narrow connecting point. Purely for convenience I shall refer to the field to the south as 'Field A' and the field to the north as 'Field B'. 'Field A' rises from the south to a hill in its middle and then falls back down to its northern point adjacent to 'Field B'. This field is on lower land but rises towards the public footpath to its northern edge. The A508, to the site's western boundary forms a clearly defined boundary between the built form of Brixworth and the open countryside to the east. 'Field B' is also clearly visible to distant views to the north as the landscape rises away in this direction. The appeal site therefore makes a strong contribution to the open character of the countryside

beyond Brixworth. It is therefore in harmony with open views of the surrounding area. Consequently, the site makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

5. The proposal would result in the provision of a reception/amenity building, car parking, access road and pitches for around 57 touring caravans. The submitted layout plan¹ shows that the caravans would be arranged around the middle of 'Field A'. There would be an open area in the centre of the grouping and on the highest part of this field. It is not disclosed how 'Field B' would be arranged or used. The caravans around 'Field A' would be largely located in a cluster around the reception building and its car park. The caravan plots would therefore be arranged in a relatively regimented fashion within a core area of the site. The proposed development would have an inevitable visual impact on the current appearance of the site. However, its wider visual impact would depend on the context of the site, including local topography, land use and intervisibility with the surrounding area.
6. The Appellant's Visual and Impact Assessment considers views of the site from several viewpoints (VPs). During my visit I was able to access most of these points. Having visited in the winter months it is recognised that leaf cover would provide additional screening for parts of the site in the summer months. Some of the identified viewpoints would provide either no or limited glimpses of the site due to local tree cover. Intervisibility between the site, and where the A508 is adjacent to it, are limited due to the relatively substantial field boundaries. However, 'Field A' is slightly higher than the entrance road and car park serving the country Park, being on a raised embankment of around 2 metres. Therefore, views from many locations along this route and the link road to the sailing club, provide open views of large parts of 'Field A' especially from VP1 and 2.
7. 'Field A' is partially visible from the car park serving the country park and its access road. Such views would be visually intrusive into this setting due to gaps in the hedge boundary on the eastern side of the site and due to the scale of development proposed. The site is also exposed to views when approaching the site along the A508 from Pitsford due to the substantial change in elevation. Furthermore, the appeal site is clearly visible from numerous views within the northern side of Pitsford. These include from the southern entrance to Spring Hill Farm, All Saints Church and VP9. These views show the appeal site to have a clear and important visual link with the adjacent country park and reservoir.
8. VP10 also shows that the sailing club, and its associated boats, are discrete and grouped together by the water. The club and its associated paraphernalia therefore have a limited visual impact on the surrounding verdant context of this view. Furthermore, the view from Pitsford towards Brixworth is regarded as particularly important in the Brixworth Neighbourhood Plan (2016) (NP). The roofs of the housing estate beyond the site are clearly visible in the background when looking north from Pitsford. This creates some visual intrusion into the rural character of the area. However, the estate is visually separated from the appeal site and middle ground by the strong tree line alongside the A508. This boundary creates a defined delineation of land uses between the settlement and the appeal site.

¹ Planning drawing A_1726 PL600

9. Consequently, the appeal site (especially 'Field A') has limited screening as viewed from several key viewpoints from the south, referenced in evidence, and other views including those identified above. Its exposed location is largely derived from local topography that places large parts of 'Field A' and 'B' in elevated and visible positions. The proposed reception building, associated roadways and caravans would therefore be an overt and harmful grouping within this setting. Furthermore, the proposed landscape strategy would be ineffective to mitigate the visual impact of the proposal. The proposed development is of a scale that would be unable to be effectively screened or be successfully blended into the wider landscape character. As a result, the proposal would have a significant adverse impact on the landscape character of the surrounding area, including the setting of the country park and the SSSI.
10. The proposal would therefore not accord with policies SA, BN5, E7 and R2 of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1)(CS). These seek, amongst other things, for development to meet the presumption in favour of sustainable development and to enhance the landscape which contribute to the character of an area. These also seek to support tourism development that is of a use, form and scale which does not harm the quality of the natural environment and to support business in the rural economy that would be of an appropriate scale to respect the character of an area. Furthermore, the proposal would not satisfy policies RA6, ENV1 and ENV10 of the LP. These require development in the open countryside to maintain the distinctive character and quality of the district's landscape and deliver high quality design that responds to the local context.
11. Also, the proposal would not satisfy policies 3 and 11 of the NP which seek development to not result in harm to the tranquillity, character and beauty of the countryside and support proposals that enhance the rural economy subject to policies EM10 of the LP (pertaining to limited industrial and commercial development) and policy R2 of the CS. These policies are generally consistent with the Framework which require development to be sympathetic to the local character and for decisions to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
12. However, policies R1 of the CS and policy 2 of the NP relate to the provision of new dwellings in rural areas. The proposal, for the provision of touring caravans, would not qualify as residential development subject to spatial housing policies. These policies are therefore not germane to this case.

Other Matters

13. The proposed development would strengthen the overall tourism offer within the district. This would respond to anecdotal evidence that holiday makers would have a greater need for UK tourism due to Covid-19 restrictions on international travel. Furthermore, the proposal would provide a financial lift within the local area. This would benefit the vitality of the local community including the Country Park and Brixworth itself. These benefits would be of moderate merit in favour of the proposal.
14. The adjacent site, to the east of the appeal site, gained planning approval to be used as a caravan park in 2011. The site associated with this approval is substantially smaller than the proposal site. It is also within a valley between rising topography. Moreover, it is discrete to the country park and the SSSI due to substantial intervening tree screening. For these combined reasons, it is

likely that the adjacent site would have a limited impact on the landscape character of the wider area. Therefore, although the proposed use may result in some locational synergy with the approved development this alone would be of limited benefit in favour of the proposal.

15. The site would be within an accessible location, with good access to local roads and the country park. It is also adjacent to Brixworth, which is a settlement that provides access to a wide range of goods and services. This is of moderate benefit in favour of the proposal.

Conclusion

16. The Framework seeks to support a prosperous rural economy and rural tourism. The proposal would make a modest contribution towards the local rural economy with good accessibility to the highway network and to goods and services. However, these limited to modest benefits would not outweigh the conflict found with the development plan. Moreover, I conclude that the appeal proposal would conflict with the development plan when taken as a whole and does therefore not represent the sustainable development for which the Framework advocates a presumption in favour. There are no other material considerations, including the Framework, that outweigh this conflict.
17. For the above reasons the appeal does not succeed.

Mr Ben Plenty

INSPECTOR