



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 2 February 2021

by Bhupinder Thandi BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/J1860/W/20/3257690

Hillhampton Farm, Hillhampton, Great Witley WR6 6JU

- 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 Nigel Drew against the decision of Malvern Hills District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/01861/FUL, dated 13 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 20 April 2020.
 - The development proposed is change of use of land for the stationing of 9no. static caravans for holiday accommodation.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. As part of the appeal the appellant has provided a Landscape Statement. I have paid regard to the document in consideration of the appeal and with regard to the Wheatcroft principles I am satisfied that no interested parties have been prejudiced by my approach.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site largely comprises an area of ruderal grassland located on a hillside located within the Nutnell Brook valley. Above the site on the ridge is a row of tall trees that screen polytunnels associated with a fruit nursery. The site sits within a wider agrarian landscape defined by rolling hills and wooded areas. The site's green and open character positively contributes to the verdant appearance of the rolling hillside and landscape. A number of public footpaths cross the wider landscape.
5. The Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment sets out that the site sits within the Wooded Estate lands area of which key characteristics include a wooded agricultural landscape, rolling topography with occasional steep sided hills and low escarpments.
6. I have paid regard to the appellant's landscape analysis and I accept that longer range views of the site are relatively limited, yet I observed that the site is clearly visible from viewpoints along the bridleway, notwithstanding the presence of landscaping between them.

7. The lodges would be set down from the skyline, viewed against existing trees and would have a natural timber log cabin appearance. However, from these localised views the lodges would be prominent features clearly distinguishable to users of the bridleway. Whilst the lodges would sit on the natural topography of the hillside the proposed development would result in an uncharacteristic concentration of buildings prominently positioned on the hillside drawing the eye. They would be intrusive features within the landscape and would have a detrimental impact on the rural and open character of the site.
8. I acknowledge that the impact of the lodges could be softened as the proposed planting matures. However, this would take time to establish, and would have to reach significant height and solidity to provide an effective visual screen. Given the location of the lodges was chosen in part for views they would offer including of Abberley Hill, such screening is unlikely to be significant particularly to the valley side, where the lodges would remain prominent on the hillside.
9. Whilst the proposed access road would in part follow established tracks and field boundaries the route proposed would meander over the hillside. Irrespective of its finish the extent and width of the road combined with the parking area and the inevitable presence of domestic vehicles would spread development across the landscape and would result in an urbanising effect which would be significantly at odds with the prevailing landscape character eroding its verdant and agrarian appearance. The use of fencing or planting along the road, in my view, would make it more prominent within the surrounding area rather than integrating into the landscape.
10. I conclude that the proposed development would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area contrary to Policies SWDP21, SWDP23 and SWDP36 of the South Worcestershire Development Plan (2016) which, amongst other things, seek developments that complement the character of an area, are appropriate to and integrate with the character of the landscape setting and for caravans or log cabins to relate well to its setting and have regard to landscape considerations.
11. It would also be contrary to paragraph 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) which sets out that decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other things, protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Other Matters

12. The appellant contends that the site is formed of 'left-over' and disturbed land which cannot be utilised for agricultural purposes. Whilst this may be the case, I find that its green and open appearance positively contributes to the verdant and agrarian landscape and is not justification for a scheme that I have found to be harmful.
13. I acknowledge that the Framework encourages economic growth, agricultural diversification, rural tourism and leisure developments and that there would be some economic and social benefits through the creation of holiday accommodation. However, it also recognises that developments should be sensitive to its surroundings. These factors individually or cumulatively do not lead me to reach a different conclusion that the appeal should be dismissed.

14. New planting and ecological improvements including the native wildflower meadow would not, in my view, overcome the harm that I have identified.
15. The proposed development would not increase the risk of flooding, adversely affect the nearby highway or result in solar glare. However, these matters would not outweigh the harm that I have identified in relation to the main issue.
16. The location of the proposed development and its accessibility to nearby towns and cities and tourist attractions counts neither for nor against the proposal.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons set out above the appeal does not succeed.

B Thandi

INSPECTOR