The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 January 2021

by M Cryan BA(Hons) DipTP MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/W/20/3260276
Haycroft Farm, Peckforton Hall Lane, Spurstow, Tarporley CW6 9TF

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant approval required under Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(England) Order 2015 (as amended).
- The appeal is made by R Jones against the decision of Cheshire East Council.
- The application Ref 20/1659N, dated 20 April 2020, was refused by notice dated 18 May 2020.
- The development proposed is an agricultural corn store.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the siting of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is part of a field within Haycroft Farm, an arable farm which sits north west of the small village of Spurstow. The proposed development is the erection of an 'agricultural corn store' which would be used to store a range of crops grown on Haycroft, primarily wheat, barley and oilseed rape. This would be accessed via an existing field gate from Peckforton Hall Lane just to the west of the edge of the village.

4. Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(England) Order 2015 (as amended) (hereafter 'the GPDO') requires (amongst other things) the developer to apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required as to the siting, design and external appearance of the building. The store would be a steel framed building, measuring approximately 30.5m in length, 18.3m in breadth, 6.4m to eaves and 8.8m to the roof ridge. It would be oriented with its long axis approximately on a north-south alignment, with a large doorway on the south facing elevation. The lower parts of the walls would be concrete panels with a dull grey finish, with PVC coated steel panels above and a cement sheet roof, both roof and upper walls being finished in a matt juniper green paint. In this case, the Council considered that the proposed building would be agricultural in appearance and

fit for its intended purpose, and there are no issues about its design or appearance.

5. Although the appellant has described the store as being on the fringe of the village of Spurstow, it would be sited in a field separate from any other building and some distance from the nearest dwelling, Rose Cottage on Peckforton Hall Lane to the south east. It would be around 300m as the crow flies from the Haycroft Farm complex of buildings to the north east, and a similar distance from a poultry farm on the south side of Peckforton Hall Lane. The surrounding area is a rural farmed landscape, and I accept the appellant's point that agricultural buildings are therefore not uncommon in the local area. However, I saw on my site visit that in the locality, including at the other nearby farms of Peckforton Hall and Manor Farm to which the appellant drew my attention, and Haycroft Farm itself, such buildings tend to be in clusters around the main farm which they serve. From what I saw at the time of my site visit, a large and isolated building such as that proposed would be an unusual feature in the surrounding area.

6. Because of screening by other buildings, planting, and the lie of the land, the proposed building would not be prominent in public views either from Spurstow village or Haycroft Farm itself, nor from the public footpath (Spurstow FP3) which passes through the farm some way north and east of the appeal site. However, the broadly level or gently rising topography mean that the proposed store would be more exposed to views from the south and west. Although the building would be set back some 145m or so from the field gate providing access to the site, because of its size I consider that it would be readily visible from Peckforton Hall Lane to the south west, and from the public footpath which crosses the field to the west (Peckforton FP8). I saw at my site visit that the hedge forming the western edge of the appeal site is sparse in places and would provide limited screening. Even if reinforced with additional planting, as the appellant has suggested, a hedge rising to three or four metres would do little to conceal the 30.5m long and 6.4m high side elevation of the proposed building behind. The existing mature trees on the site would also provide some cover, at least when in full leaf, and the appellant suggests this could also be augmented by further tree planting. Again though, given the size of the proposed store, this would have a limited effect on reducing its visual impact. Overall, because of its size and siting the building would be a prominent and intrusive feature, particularly in winter when the nearby trees and hedgerows would be without leaf cover and screening would be limited.

7. Haycroft Farm is held freehold by the appellant. He resides and keeps around 400 cattle at Stonehouse Farm, which is a tenancy around 1.3 miles south west of the appeal site. The proposed store would therefore be well-located operationally for the appellant's two main holdings. The business currently rents storage space for produce at Guilden Sutton some 12 miles or so to the north west of the appeal site, and crops are moved back and forward between the farms and the storage space. The provision of on-site storage would therefore lead to cost and time savings for the appellant's business, as well as reduced carbon outputs, arising from need for fewer, or at least shorter, journeys between field and store. I consider that this benefit carries some modest weight in favour of the scheme in general, although it does not justify the specific siting proposed, and this consideration would not therefore outweigh the harmful impacts which I have found.

8. The appellant has indicated that as the proposed siting would allow direct access from the store to Peckforton Hall Lane, it would also reduce the need for farm vehicles to travel along single track lanes through Spurstow, using the narrow entrance to Haycroft Farm. However, the evidence before me indicates that servicing the storage unit in Guilden Sutton requires the use of two or three tractors and trailers, and this does not suggest that the overall level of traffic generated would be likely to be particularly unexpected by, or disturbing to, neighbouring residents in a rural agricultural area at harvest time. Furthermore, neither the farm access lane nor the road through the village appeared to me to be unusually narrow or constrained by the standards of the surrounding area. This particular consideration is therefore one to which I attach very limited weight.

9. Haycroft farmhouse is a Grade II Listed Building, and there are medieval village and field system remains immediately to its east which form a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). The appellant therefore suggests that siting a storage building within or adjacent to the main Haycroft Farm complex was discounted due to the sensitivity of the heritage assets. However, there are already other more modern agricultural buildings within the farm, sited away from the farmhouse and the SAM. While the protection of heritage assets is an important consideration there is nothing before me to indicate that there has been any form of consultation between the parties or an application which would allow this matter to be properly assessed. In the context of the current appeal, it is therefore an argument which also carries very limited weight, and I have in any case of course determined the proposal before me on its own merits.

10. Because of its siting, the proposed building would be an intrusive and dominant feature in the local landscape, which would be harmful to the open rural character and appearance of the area. I have carefully considered the matters in favour of the scheme which the appellant has raised, but none either individually or in combination outweighs the harm I have found. I therefore conclude that prior approval should not be granted.

Conclusion

11. For the reasons given above the appeal is dismissed.

M Cryan

Inspector