



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 March 2021

by Mrs H Nicholls FdA MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 March 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Q1153/W/20/3255446

Barwick Downs, Iddesleigh, Devon EX19 8BP

- 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 Robert & Mrs Catherine Venn against the decision of West Devon Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 00600/2015, dated 20 May 2015, was refused by notice dated 7 January 2020.
 - The development proposed is 2 roadman units to become holiday accommodation.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the location of the development accords with local policies that seek to focus development, including tourism development, close to existing settlements in order to limit travel by private vehicle.

Reasons

3. The two units of holiday accommodation would be sited within the agricultural unit that extends to around 4.8 hectares. The location of the agricultural unit is rural and isolated, with the closest settlements of Iddesleigh some approximate 2.5 km as the crow flies to the north-west, Winkleigh at least some 5 km away to the east and Hatherleigh some 7 km to the south-west. The nearest main centre is Okehampton, approximately 15 km to the south. The roads serving the area are rural in nature, meaning that they are often narrow with limited passing places, without footways, cycle paths or street lighting.
4. Policy SPT1 of the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (2019) (JLP) sets the overall aim for a sustainable future for the plan area, setting objectives under the headings of the economy, society and environment. Policy SPT2 focuses on the creation of sustainable linked neighbourhoods and rural communities and amongst other things, seeks for the population to have reasonable access to a vibrant mixed use centre, which meets daily community needs for local services such as neighbourhood shops, health and wellbeing services and community facilities.
5. Policy TTV1 sets out the hierarchy of settlements for the distribution of growth and development over the plan period. Clearly, the isolated countryside location of the site means that it does not fall within an identified settlement under JLP Policy TTV1. Policy TTV1.4 relates to smaller villages, the hamlets and the countryside. Development in such areas is required to support the

- principles of sustainable development and sustainable communities in accordance with Policies SPT1 and SPT2.
6. JLP Policy TTV2 sets out that the delivery of sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments in the 'Thriving Towns and Villages' policy area (TTVA) will be supported where they reinforce the sustainable settlement hierarchy and where they deliver a prosperous and sustainable pattern of development. The Policy also seeks to ensure that such proposals benefit rural businesses, communities and visitors and respect the character of the countryside and historic settlements.
 7. JLP Policy DEV15 also applies in the TTVA and relates to developments in suitable rural locations that can help to improve the balance of jobs and diversify the rural economy. It sets out that camping, caravan, chalet, or similar facilities that respond to an identified local need will be supported, provided the proposal is compatible with the rural road network and has no adverse environmental impact. It also requires proposals to demonstrate safe access to the existing highway network, a positive relationship with existing buildings and avoid a significant increase in the number of trips requiring the private car. As a 'glamping' proposal, Policy DEV15 is specifically relevant to the proposal.
 8. The appeal proposal is in an isolated rural location, distant from settlements as identified above. Whilst future guests could walk or cycle for recreational purposes, there are no facilities or settlements within a suitable distance or along routes that would enable any real choice in terms of mode of travel. Also given the absence of public transport to local settlements, all future guests would be reliant on private vehicles to purchase goods or to access facilities to enrich their stay.
 9. Policy DEV15 also requires a demonstration of an identified local need for such facilities. Despite some suggestion of an increased demand for peaceful holidays and UK-based travel options, owing in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is little cogent evidence that suggests an identified need for the development in the vicinity of the appeal site. The suggestion that Devon is a highly popular holiday location cannot infer a desirability for accommodation in such an isolated location with associated demands on travel time to access facilities and services typical of such stays. Similarly, the appellants' desires to provide a diversified income from their agricultural holding does not amount to a 'need', which would be expected to relate to a demand in bookings and evidence of a shortfall in either type and/or number of such accommodation.
 10. I note the positive effect of the appellants' investment into the site and the vast number of trees planted. However, there is no policy within the JLP that enables me to assume that carbon sequestration from tree planting can directly offset the impacts of an unsustainable pattern of travel. The JLP's underlying aims are to ensure development is sited in such a way as to minimise travel and ensure, with regard to tourism development, that it is being provided if and where it is needed. The suggestion that any holiday guests would travel by car once or twice during their stay is not a matter which could be controlled by condition and nor do I concur with the view that there are sufficient recreational opportunities accessible on foot or bike to minimise the need to travel.

11. Whilst the appellant raises that the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) allows, in paragraph 84, for some development in rural areas that may be adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport, those are developments intended to meet local business and community needs. The JLP sets out that tourism proposals can be permitted where locally identified needs are adequately evidenced, but I have not found this to be true of the current appeal.
12. In view of this main issue, the proposal conflicts with Policies SPT1, SPT2, TTV1, TTV2 and DEV15 of the JLP. For similar reasons, the proposal would also conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Other Matters

13. I note that there would be safe vehicular access to the site and limited visual impact owing to the size of the units and density of tree screening on site. The absence of other harms is a neutral factor in the overall planning balance.
14. The appellants propose to maintain the business, including the proposed tourism units, as 'off grid' and to use greywater recycling. These measures, and those to offer educational opportunities to guests and members of the public, whilst laudable, cannot be enforced through any planning conditions and do not minimise the degree of conflict with the main objectives of the development plan.
15. Whilst the encouragement of the appellants business is noted from the submitted letters of support, such views are not unanimous and do not outweigh the identified conflict with the development plan.

Planning balance and conclusion

16. The proposal conflicts with the development plan, when read as a whole. There would be some economic benefit from the proposal to other rural businesses through visitors spending money in the locality. However, these benefits would be relatively minor given the scale of the development and are attributed only limited weight in the overall balance.
17. Thus, neither the benefits nor other matters put forward amount to considerations of sufficient materiality to indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan.
18. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters, the appeal is dismissed.

Hollie Nicholls

INSPECTOR