



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 4 May 2021

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7th June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/M2325/W/21/3266902

**Barnfield Farm, Back Lane, Weeton with Preese, Preston, Lancashire
PR4 3HS**

- 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 Ms K Ixler against the decision of Fylde Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20/0440, dated 29 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 21 September 2020.
 - The development proposed is change of use of land for the siting of six holiday lodges, one warden's lodge and six touring pitches together with creation of new fishing lake and landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Applications for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Ms K Ixler against Fylde Borough Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - i) Whether the proposal would be small-scale tourist accommodation in the countryside;
 - ii) Whether the location is suitable for new residential development; and
 - iii) The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Development in the countryside

4. The appeal site is an irregular shaped parcel of land adjacent to and accessed from Back Lane. It is in the countryside to the north of the M55 motorway. The proposal would comprise 7 lodges around a fishing lake, 6 caravan pitches, car parking, conversion of a stable building to WC facilities, and landscaping.
5. The Council's locational development strategy seeks to focus the majority of new development in accordance with the settlement hierarchy and in strategic locations that provide essential services and facilities, sustainable transport and employment opportunities. In the countryside, development is limited to specific purposes and uses appropriate to rural areas, including those which would help diversify the rural economy. This includes small-scale tourist accommodation and holiday caravan sites.

6. I have not been provided with a definition of what would constitute small-scale tourism sites. In this regard, 6 holiday lodges and 6 touring pitches would be a relatively limited number of units of tourist accommodation. However, the appeal site extends to approximately 2.3ha, which is a large area of land.
7. The built development would occupy a relatively small proportion of the site. I note the Council's concerns that the site could therefore accommodate a greater quantum of development in future, although this is a matter that could be controlled by planning condition. Irrespective of the number of units, their dispersed nature and spread across the site would result in the appearance of a disproportionately large footprint of development. Therefore, taking account of the size of the site and the design of the development, the proposal would not appear to be a small-scale tourism site. Moreover, it would not be the sustainable growth and expansion or diversification of an agricultural or other land-based rural business, such as is promoted by the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).
8. My attention has been drawn to 2 studies in Wales which categorised caravan and chalet sites according to the number of units and the size of the site. According to these, and if the proposal had been in Wales, then it would either be categorized as a small to medium site or as a medium sized site. Even if these methodologies were adopted Council guidance, they do not demonstrate that the proposal would be small-scale development in this area.
9. Therefore, the proposal would not be a small-scale tourism development which would help to diversify the rural economy. It would conflict with the rural tourism aims of Policies GD4, EC6 and EC7 of the Fylde Local Plan to 2032 Adopted October 2018 (the LP). These promote, among other things, small-scale rural tourism through rural diversification and limited increases in static and touring caravan pitches within existing site boundaries. The proposal would conflict with the aims of the Framework in relation to sustainable growth and diversification of rural businesses and rural tourism developments which respect the character of the countryside.

Residential development in the countryside

10. The proposed warden's lodge would apparently be an identical static caravan to those proposed as tourism accommodation. On this basis, it would have a living area, bedrooms to sleep several persons, a kitchen and bathroom facilities. It would have the characteristics of a dwellinghouse in that it would afford those who used it the facilities required for day-to-day private domestic existence. It would function as a reception and administrative hub for the site and it would be available for staff to use during evenings and overnight if a need arose, such as for security purposes or if guests arrived late.
11. Policy S1 of the LP sets out that the Council's locational development strategy seeks to focus development in accordance with the hierarchy of settlements. In the countryside outside of the settlements, isolated new homes are not permitted unless required to meet the essential needs of a rural worker. In this case, there is no requirement for a rural worker to live permanently at the site. While guests might arrive late on occasion, it has not been demonstrated that staff would need to stay overnight. There is little to suggest that concerns about future security could not be addressed by alternate means. It has not been demonstrated that residential accommodation is justified by the needs of

the business. Therefore, the warden's lodge does not meet the exceptions for new homes in the countryside.

12. A map has been provided to illustrate the relationship of the site to its surroundings. The site is not in or near a settlement and the distances involved are greater than could be considered a short or convenient walk. The intervening roads are rural in character with no footways or lighting and they are not conducive to walking as an alternative to car journeys. The site is not conveniently located or accessible by public forms of transport, including buses and trains. Therefore, future occupiers of the site, be it staff or visitors, would be heavily dependent on private car journeys.
13. There are existing dwellings in the area, including the nearby Hollybush Farm, Kinton Lodge and The Barns. However, the warden's lodge would not be physically, visually or functionally related to these dwellings. It would be isolated and remote by virtue of distance from settlements, services and facilities and its reliance on private car journeys. There is little to demonstrate that a new dwelling in this location would contribute to the type of sustainable development in rural areas promoted by the Framework.
14. I accept that the warden's lodge is not proposed for permanent residential use. However, while the appellant considers its occupancy could be controlled by condition, no suitable form of wording of condition has been proposed. In any case, given that the need for a residential dwelling, albeit occupied occasionally, has not been demonstrated, I am not satisfied that is a matter that could be satisfactorily addressed by condition.
15. Therefore, the location is not suitable for new residential development. The proposal would conflict with Policies S1, DLF1, GD4 and H6 of the LP. These require, among other things, that proposals contribute to sustainable patterns of development, focussing on locations with accessible services, facilities and sustainable transport networks and avoiding the creation of new homes in the countryside without specific justification.

Character and appearance

16. The appeal site comprises a field of grazing land, with earth embankments, that rises away from the road towards the shelterbelt woodland to its rear. It is in an area of flat to gently undulating countryside characterised by predominantly large open fields with scattered ponds and patches of woodland. Field boundaries are formed by low hedgerows or fences. The area is sparsely developed with dwellings and building groups, including farmsteads. Consequently, although not far from the M6 motorway, the area and the appeal site have a traditional rural character and appearance.
17. Although located to the north of a cluster of residential buildings, the timber lodges and touring caravans would not be in keeping with the traditional brick and slate former farmstead buildings. The dispersed layout and arrangement of lodges around the sweeping internal access would be incongruous and discordant and it would erode the traditional rural pattern of development in the area. The proposal would not be read as part of or as an extension to the nearby cluster of buildings.
18. Landscape planting has been proposed to screen the development from views. The bulk of the tree planting would be along the northern boundary and in

either corner of the site abutting the existing shelterbelt to the west. These areas of planting would not screen the caravans or the lodges from views from the south and east, including along the road.

19. The caravan pitches would be on the lower-lying part of the site, but they would be close to the southern boundary where they would be poorly screened by the boundary hedgerow. Their proposed regular arrangement on 2 sides of a square car park would render them conspicuous. Moreover, even if the side boundary hedge could be enhanced to provide greater screening benefits, the roadside hedgerow would need to be kept short to enable visibility at the site entrance. The small area of tree planting proposed along the road frontage would provide only limited screening of the proposal. Therefore, I find that that the touring caravans would be readily visible, even once the planting matures.
20. By virtue of their elevated and open siting in the low-lying landscape, the lodges would be prominent in views. They would be modest single storey buildings, but the visual impact would be exacerbated by their elevation on raised platforms and the external decking areas. The proposal would be increasingly visible during the times of year when trees are not in leaf and overnight, when the internal and external lighting of lodges and caravans and the bollard lighting of the internal access would be conspicuous. I accept that the nearby traditional building group is likely to result in some light pollution overnight. However, the light spill from the dwellinghouses would not assimilate or mitigate the adverse lighting effects of the proposal. There would be cumulative visual impacts arising from the movement of vehicles and the elevated and prominent parking of cars adjacent to the lodges.
21. In the absence of effective screening, the proposal would be visually obtrusive and it would not make a positive contribution to sense of place or to the rural character of the area. The introduction of uncharacteristic new built form and the loss of openness of the landscape would result in adverse visual impacts to the detriment of local residents as well as users of the highway and footpaths.
22. The proposal would be heavily reliant on the retention of the existing woodland to the west and the landscape planting to mitigate adverse visual impacts. However, while viewpoint photographs have been provided to demonstrate the existing situation, there are no photomontages to illustrate the effectiveness of the screen planting. In this regard, if the adjacent shelterbelt is in separate ownership then there would be no guarantee that it would be retained or managed over the lifetime of the proposal. Moreover, even if the new planting could be relied upon to assimilate the proposal into the landscape, no details of landscape management have been provided to demonstrate that the planting would be appropriately managed and retained.
23. Therefore, the proposal would harm the rural character and appearance of the countryside. It would conflict with LP Policies GD4, EC6, EC7, GD7 and ENV1. These require, among other things, that development avoids harm to the character of the countryside, that it respects and responds to its surroundings, and contributes positively to local character and distinctiveness, and measures should be in place for the management and maintenance of landscaping. It would also conflict with the policies in the Framework that require development to respect and be sympathetic to its surroundings, including the character of the countryside and landscape setting.

Other Considerations

24. The presence of far larger tourism sites elsewhere does not demonstrate that the proposal is small-scale in this location. My attention has been drawn to the nearby Sharrocks Barn and Little Orchard Caravan Park, and Whitmore Caravan Park. The appellant suggests that the scale and arrangement of the proposal would be characteristic of these sites, including their woodland setting. However, I am not aware that those caravan parks are similarly elevated and prominent in the landscape. Moreover, the limited detail provided do not demonstrate that they are directly comparable to the proposal or that they were considered in the same policy context. The presence of ostensibly similar development elsewhere does not provide a justification for the scheme.
25. The proposal would not result in adverse impacts on protected species. Highway matters could be addressed by planning condition. There would be visual and noise disturbance but, taking into account the distance from dwellings and the proposed planting, the proposal would not significantly harm the living conditions of nearby residential occupiers. These matters weigh neither for nor against the scheme.
26. The proposal could result in biodiversity enhancement, subject to detailed design and appropriate long-term management. In this regard, and in the absence of details of landscape and biodiversity management that demonstrate net gains, this matter carries limited weight in favour of the scheme.
27. The proposal would not be the diversification of an existing rural business. It would be a private benefit to the appellant. The tourism accommodation would result in limited wider economic benefits, including during construction. There would be limited support for local shops and services. The application form indicates that there would be no new employment opportunities, although the warden's lodge is proposed to be used by staff.
28. The appeal site is within the Impact Risk Zone for Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary and Ribble and Alt Estuaries habitats sites. The Council's ecological advisor has screened the proposal and concluded that it would not result in likely significant effects on the habitats sites. I have a duty to carry out a Habitats Regulations Assessment for the purposes of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, but as I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons it is not necessary for me to consider this matter further.

Conclusion

29. For the reasons set out above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan and there are no material considerations, including the limited benefits, that would outweigh that conflict.
30. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR