
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 June 2021

by Mrs H Nicholls FdA MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/J9497/W/21/3269596

Land at Ash Park Farm, Sticklepath EX20 2NG

- 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 D Mallett against the decision of Dartmoor National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref 0295/20, dated 23 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 3 September 2020.
 - The development proposed is siting of shepherds hut with WC/shower unit, treatment unit and solar panels for holiday business use.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I noted during my site visit that an open-sided timber canopy structure had been erected in the vicinity of the appeal site and was in use for leisure purposes, along with other items of outdoor furniture. This structure is not described in the description of the proposal or detailed on the plans as either existing or proposed. In the absence of detail as to its intended purpose or lawful status, I have assumed it does not form part of the appeal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are: (i) whether the location of the proposal accords with local policies that seek to limit the type and location of tourism development within Dartmoor National Park; and (ii) the effects of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and whether it would preserve or enhance the Dartmoor National Park landscape.

Reasons

Location of development

4. The yard and complex of main farm buildings at Ash Park Farm lie immediately to the north of the village of Sticklepath. The appeal site is detached from the village. The point of access lies a short distance from the main farm complex but the appeal site forms part of the surrounding agricultural land and is approximately 500 metres across the fields from the point of access.
5. The appeal site is an undeveloped part of the fields that lie adjacent to the River Taw. There are substantial hedgerows with trees and a wooded valley bottom area alongside the river. The area has a very lush, green and verdant

- quality to it and, despite the noise of the nearby A30, also feels remote and tranquil.
6. The proposal is to site a shepherds hut and converted horse trailer-type structure which would collectively provide a single bed unit of tourism accommodation with separate WC and shower facility. They would be powered by a small array of solar panels and served by a non-mains drainage facility.
 7. Of relevance to the appeal, Policy DMD44 of the Development Management and Delivery DPD¹ sets out that planning permission for tourism development will be permitted where it comprises accommodation provided as part of an acceptable farm diversion exercise, or, small scale tented camping sites including camping pods or other similar structures provided as part of a farm diversion exercise and provided that there is no harm to the landscape.
 8. I note from the evidence and from my site visit that permission has recently been granted to site almost identical structures to form a tourism unit on a site adjoining the farm complex². These structures were visible from the roadside above the hedge but did not appear entirely incongruous given the range of dwellings, farm buildings and other domestic buildings in the immediate vicinity. The site of the new tourism unit relates well to the village of Sticklepath and enables guests to access a range of facilities on foot or cycle. This indicates that the Authority accept that a diversification of the farm revenue stream through the provision of tourism accommodation is possible on land associated with the farm. It also suggests that the nature of the appeal proposal is one that falls to be considered as a farm diversification scheme, also supportable under Policy DMD35.
 9. The provision of a shepherds hut and associated WC/shower facility in a separate structure would enable a form of 'glamping'. Whilst they are individually bigger than a typical camping pod and more substantial than any tented accommodation, they would cater for a similar tourism market for people that want a basic level of accommodation in a quaint and ready-made format. I do not agree that they are less obtrusive than camping pods, but are less so than a typical caravan or chalet structure.
 10. Given that the proposal is therefore a small scale camping-type facility and would clearly diversify the farming enterprise, the aspect left for consideration under Policy DMD44 is whether or not the proposal would harm the landscape; a matter which I address below.

Character and appearance

11. As indicated, the appeal site is positioned in a remote area of the farm, surrounded by fields, the river and areas of woodland with the backdrop of the Dartmoor hills. It is quintessentially unspoilt countryside with very few visible built features in the surroundings that suggest that the site is on a working farm or in relatively close proximity to a village.
12. The open-fronted timber shelter which has been introduced onto the land has had a degree of impact on the special qualities of this part of the Dartmoor National Park landscape, that is of the impressively-scaled, unspoilt, rolling countryside. The structure appears domestic in appearance and incongruous in

¹ Dartmoor National Park Authority - Development Management and Delivery Development Plan Document (2013)

² Under planning permission ref: 0465/20 dated 27 November 2020

its setting. That it is only likely to be visible in views from private farmland rather than more widely from either a local road or important viewpoints elsewhere is not the key consideration. Similarly, whether the larger, greater collective mass of structures and domestic paraphernalia associated with the appeal proposal would only be viewed from within the site and the adjoining privately-owned fields does not suggest that there would be no landscape harm. The proposal can cause landscape harm by being out of context with the surroundings separately of the degree of harm that it can cause to the views experienced by visual receptors from publicly accessible views.

13. Using the shelter and the glimpsed roadside views of the permitted tourism unit for reference, in my view, the proposed structures would introduce a development that would spoil the undeveloped and tranquil qualities of the site and appear incongruous in their context. Despite that the design of such may have evolved from typical vehicles and structures that would have once been used in association with the keeping of sheep and horses, these are not commonplace in the landscape at the present time, nor would the domesticated appeal structures take on the same rudimentary appearance as their predecessors. Consequently, the proposal would amount to more than introducing tourists to stay in structures that may otherwise be 'lawful' in connection with the use of the land and I have limited evidence that such would not require planning permission in any event.
14. Consequently, the appeal proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area and would fail to preserve the Dartmoor National Park landscape qualities. It therefore conflicts with Policies COR1, COR3 and COR4 of the Core Strategy³ and DMD1b, DMD3, DMD5 and DMD7 of the DMD. These Policies, collectively seek to ensure that development respects and enhances the character and quality of local landscapes and to demonstrate an appropriate scale and layout to sustain local distinctiveness and Dartmoor's special environmental qualities.

Other Matters

15. I note that the appeal scheme is promoted as one which would offer a different quality than the permitted unit adjacent to the farm, given the additional level of seclusion and tranquillity that could be enjoyed as a contrast to that in close proximity of the working farm and village limits. However, it is the very limited degree of human influence which makes the area so special and thus, why the appeal proposal would be harmful in this context. It would appear that guests can be directed to enjoy some of the ambience of the area as a minor part of their stay from the base at the farmyard in any event, making use of the all-terrain vehicle as part of the attraction of such.

Planning balance and conclusion

16. The appeal proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and would fail to preserve the affected area of the Dartmoor National Park landscape. For these reasons, the proposal conflicts with the aforementioned Policies, including DMD Policy DMD44, and, consequently, with the development plan, when read as a whole.

³ Dartmoor National Park Authority – Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2008)

17. I note that as a farm diversification scheme, it would provide additional income to the appellant, but have not been provided with any analysis of the need for such, particularly in light of the recent permission given for the other tourism unit close to the farm complex. Nonetheless, the wider economic benefits for the farm and other local businesses from visitor spending would be beneficial and adds weight in favour of the scheme.
18. However, taking these factors together, I do not consider that the benefits outweigh the identified harm in this case and do not have reason to depart from making the decision in accordance with the development plan.
19. Consequently, the appeal is dismissed.

Hollie Nicholls

INSPECTOR