



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 8 June 2021

by M Chalk BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/V0510/W/21/3269048

Saxon Farm Barn, Long Dolver Drove, Soham, CB7 5UP

- 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 Leanne Edwards against the decision of East Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/01104/FUL, dated 21 August 2020, was refused by notice dated 3 December 2020.
 - The development proposed is change of use of associated land to a "glamping" site with associated access and parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - Whether the appeal proposal accords with relevant local policies regarding the need for, and location of, new tourist accommodation; and,
 - The effect on the living conditions of neighbouring residents.

Reasons

Tourist accommodation

3. Policy EMP 8 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (the LP) states that, amongst other criteria, new camping sites and proposals for holiday cottage accommodation will be supported where proposals are located within, or well related to, an existing settlement boundary. It further requires that the need for the additional accommodation can be justified.
4. The appeal site is in a rural location a considerable distance from the nearest settlement and any services, public transport or facilities. While part of the appeal of the site may lie in its relatively isolated countryside location, the proposal only allows for basic cooking facilities and there are no shops or attractions in the near vicinity of the site. The nearest town of Soham is more than a mile from the site along roads without dedicated footpaths and is also separated by an A road, resulting in a journey that would likely be unattractive to those on foot, especially for those with limited mobility. Given that it is likely that guests would rely on cars to travel to and from the appeal site, it is therefore not well located for the provision of tourist accommodation.
5. The LP recognises that there is a need for additional tourist accommodation generally, but Policy EMP 8 requires that the need for specific types of accommodation be justified. The supporting text to Policy EMP 8 sets out what information is required to show that there is a need for the proposed

accommodation, and while it may be difficult to obtain detailed visitor numbers from other establishments, the appellant has provided little evidence to show that there is a need for this type of accommodation. There is also no formal business plan providing details of the timescale for implementation, site management, stay duration, likely costs and prices and other such information to detail how the use would operate.

6. The appeal proposal therefore conflicts with relevant local policies regarding the need for, and location of, new tourist accommodation.

Living conditions

7. No business plan has been provided to indicate the likely scale of vehicle movement associated with the development. However, given the site's location some distance from the nearest settlement, guests are likely to travel to and from the site by car. With up to ten guests staying in five pods, this is therefore likely to result in between five and ten cars being parked at the site at maximum occupancy. It is probable that guests occupying one pod will travel together when conducting trips to and from the site such as visiting an attraction even if they arrive separately. I therefore consider it is likely that each pod would typically generate around two vehicle movements onto and off the site each day, or around twenty total vehicle movements passing the neighbouring properties when at maximum occupancy.
8. The parking area associated with the use is close to the boundary with the neighbouring property, Yew Tree Barn, and the access track passes close to a side elevation of that house which has multiple windows facing the access.
9. The site is currently a mainly open field containing several outbuildings and coops. The volume of traffic arising from this use is unlikely to usually be close to that likely to result from high levels of occupancy of the proposed pods.
10. The appeal proposal would therefore be likely to result in a significant increase in the number of vehicle movements along the access, and therefore an increase in noise and disturbance to the occupiers of the neighbouring property, Yew Tree Barn. Its occupiers have stated that they have no objection to the appeal proposal, but I must consider that any permission granted would be permanent, and any disturbance arising from the use could not be addressed through the planning regime at a later date.
11. Given the quiet rural location of the appeal site and the increase in noise and disturbance likely to result from vehicle movements associated with the proposed use, I see no reason to conclude other than that it would result in unacceptable harm to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. The proposed development would therefore conflict with Policy ENV 2 of the LP, which amongst other criteria requires that developments ensure there is no significantly detrimental effect on the residential amenity of nearby occupiers.

Planning Balance

12. I have found that there would be harm arising from the location of the appeal site and lack of justification for accommodation of this type, as well as harm to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policies EMP 8 and ENV 2 of the LP, taken as a whole. These are therefore the most important policies for the determination of the appeal.

13. The appellant contends that Policy EMP 8 is out of date, as glamping as an activity was not commonplace at the time that it was written and is an activity best suited to a rural location distant from any settlement. In addition, the policy requirement to provide evidence of similar establishments in the locality and their visitor numbers is considered to be unreasonable given that this would require such establishments to divulge that information to competitors. Furthermore, the changing circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic will result in a greater demand for domestic tourist accommodation.
14. While LP Policy EMP 8 does not specifically address glamping, it does refer to camping sites and holiday cottage accommodation. Glamping is sufficiently like such uses that I am satisfied that the policy is relevant to the appeal proposal. The requirement for tourist accommodation to be located within, or well related to, an existing settlement boundary is consistent with support in the National Planning Policy Framework for sustainable rural tourism.
15. I also find that the requirement to show there is a need for the accommodation to be reasonable, as otherwise the operational development including the construction of the pods and installation of shower and toilet facilities could be carried out without their ever being brought into use if the demand does not exist. While the appellant has indicated that the pods would be constructed over time based on demand, establishing first that any such demand exists is part of the criteria for the policy.
16. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions there has been a rise in domestic tourism and demand for accommodation. However, it is not clear that this will be a permanent effect as the vaccination programme continues and restrictions lift further. The Government has introduced some temporary measures relating to the planning regime in response to the pandemic. However, there has been no indication that development plan policies relating to tourism should be interpreted differently as a result.
17. I am therefore satisfied that the conflict with policy EMP 8 can be given full weight. For the sake of clarity, there is no dispute around Policy ENV 2, and the conflict with this policy also carries full weight.
18. The creation of new tourist accommodation would bring local economic benefits. There is local support for the proposal, as well as support from prospective guests to the site that indicates some interest in the proposed use.
19. However, the appeal proposal would result in harm through its location and there is no justification for the need for the proposed development. In addition, the development would cause harm to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. These matters attract substantial weight and would not be outweighed by the benefits of the proposed development. There are therefore no material considerations to indicate that the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons set out above, the appeal fails.

M Chalk

INSPECTOR