
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 November 2021

by Benjamin Webb BA(Hons) MA MA MSc PGDip(UD) MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 November 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/21/3280077

The Old Dairy, Mill Lane, Stedham GU29 0PR

- 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 F Taylor and R Keeling against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref SDNP/20/05128/FUL, dated 16 November 2020, was refused by notice dated 5 February 2021.
 - The development proposed is described as a new agricultural barn.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. Whether the development would conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the South Downs National Park (the National Park), and whether any adverse effect would be justified by need.

Reasons

(a) National Park

3. The site is located within the National Park within which there is a statutory duty to have regard to the purposes of its designation. One of these is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. Paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework, further states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks.
4. Policy SD25 of the South Downs Local Plan 2019 (the Local Plan) sets out the development strategy for the district. This seeks to direct development to defined settlements, partly as a means of safeguarding the landscape of the National Park. The essential need for a countryside location is an exception, and in this regard Policy SD39 of the Local Plan sets out criteria for new agricultural buildings.
5. Within this context the appeal site forms the southeast corner of a field which slopes down to the River Rother. This, together with some fenced off areas adjacent to the river, are included within the blue lined area on the plans. Parts of the field are planted with trees, as is the land adjacent to the river. Both the site, and the field of which it forms part, generally blend with the attractive rural setting of Stedham, which in turn blends with the landscape of the National Park at large.

6. Insofar as the criteria set out within Policy SD39 relate to siting and design, the proposed building would be a large modern agricultural storage shed. Whilst it would thus bear no relation to the more traditional agricultural structures which characterise the broader landscape of the National Park, examples of which cluster towards the northwest, its siting in the corner of the field would also lack a close relationship with other buildings. In this regard there would be no obvious physical or visual relationship between the building and a few cylindrical concrete structures located on a sewerage works towards the south of the site.
7. In order to reduce the extent of resulting intrusion into the open landscape, a green roof and bunding are proposed. The type of green roof intended is unclear, but it is apparent that this would provide the building with an unusual appearance. The bund would itself appear as a wholly alien feature within the existing sloping terrain of the field, and this would be the case whether or not it was planted. In each regard therefore, the proposed measures would serve to highlight rather than mitigate the intrusive presence of the building.
8. Both scope for and the extent of views of the building from outside the site would be limited. This would however be partly dependent on screening provided by trees located towards the east, whose long term presence cannot be guaranteed. In the absence of these trees, it is likely that the building would be clearly exposed to view from the public footpath along the river. Within the field itself, and particularly from higher ground toward the northwest, the intrusion caused by the building and associated landscaping would otherwise be obvious.
9. In view of my findings above the development would not conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the National Park.

(b) Need

10. Agriculture is a crucial part of the National Park's economy and helps to shape its environment. It is in recognition of this that Policy SD39 of the Local Plan seeks to balance need against impact, albeit ultimately within the context of satisfying the statutory purposes of the National Park's designation.
11. The agricultural activity claimed to generate a need for the proposed building is the production of hay. Excluding those parts of the field which contain trees, its productive area is relatively small, and it is further reduced by perimeter mowing and the open-air storage of machinery and implements.
12. At the time of my visit the machinery and implements that would be accommodated within the proposed building were laid out within the field, together with some other items. Evidence has also been provided of proof of ownership. Here I have little reason to doubt that the machinery and implements are or have been used in the field at various points in the past, albeit some more recently than others. It is also apparent that storage under cover would be beneficial.
13. The machinery and implements in question are however of varied size, and most are reasonably compact. In this regard I acknowledge that the height of the proposed building has been dictated by that of the appellant's tractor, and that this would facilitate access. However, it is far from clear that this would be essential in relation to all parts of the building, and all of the machinery and

implements which could be hooked to the tractor. In this regard the scale of the proposed building appears excessive.

14. The extent to which the area designated for storage of hay would correlate with the volume of hay yielded by the field is additionally unknown in the absence of any figures. Moreover, at the time of my visit I saw no evidence that a hay crop had actually been produced this summer. Indeed, though the appellant reports that the crop is stored outdoors wrapped in plastic, and that this caters for a peak winter demand, I observed no such bales within the field or anywhere else within the blue line area. As the stated need for indoor storage of hay provides one of the key reasons for the proposed building, the apparent absence of the crop casts some doubt on the nature of need, as too on the nature of the hay making enterprise which ultimately generates it.
15. I find therefore that beyond the confirmed existence of agricultural machinery and implements and their probable past use in the field, the evidence before me is insufficient to clearly establish the full nature of the agricultural need for the building, both in terms of the operation generating it, and minimum space requirements. That being so, I cannot be satisfied that there is a need for a building of the size, dimensions or type proposed. Even had I found otherwise, this would not directly justify the intrusive siting, design and landscaping proposed. Either way therefore, the failure of the scheme to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the National Park would be unacceptable.

(c) Conclusion

16. For the reasons outlined above I conclude that the development would fail to conserve and enhance natural beauty of the National Park, and that the adverse effect would not be justified by need. The development would therefore conflict with Policies SD4 and SD5 of the Local Plan, which each seek to secure development sensitive to landscape character, and Policies SD25 and SD39 of the Local Plan as considered above.

Other Matters

17. The appellant states the building would allow the dry storage of hay, reducing the need for plastic wrap. Nonetheless, one of the items to be stored within the building would be a bale wrapper. It is also indicated that haylage would be produced according to demand. The claimed environmental benefits of not using plastic wrap are therefore open to doubt, and more so given uncertainty relating to the summer crop. As such they do not attract weight in favour of the scheme.

Conclusion

18. The effects of the development in relation to the National Park would be unacceptable, giving rise to conflict with the development plan. There are no other considerations which alter or outweigh these findings. Therefore, for the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Benjamin Webb

INSPECTOR