



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 March 2022

by F Wilkinson BSc (Hons), MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 March 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/M9496/W/21/3287372

Greencroft Farm, Weaddow Lane, Middleton By Youlgrave DE45 1LS

- 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 Wiggley against the decision of Peak District National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref NP/DDD/0820/0753, dated 18 August 2020, was refused by notice dated 16 June 2021.
 - The development is described on the application form as retrospective permission for change of use from agricultural land to a caravan site (10 pitches).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The change of use has taken place. I have considered the appeal scheme accordingly.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the development on the landscape character of the area including the Middleton By Youlgrave Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is an area of land to the south of Greencroft Farm, an operational farm lying on the southern edge of Middleton By Youlgrave, and within the Middleton By Youlgrave Conservation Area (the Conservation Area). The development comprises 10 pitches for caravans/motorhomes. Electricity hook-up points, water supply and waste water disposal points and a refuse disposal area are provided. Access to the site is from a single-track road that joins Weaddow Lane just to the west. A flagpole is located at the entrance, to help identify the site for visitors.
5. Policy L1 of the Peak District National Park Core Strategy Development Plan Document adopted 2011 (the CS) states that development within a Natural Zone will not be permitted other than in exceptional circumstances. The site does not lie within a Natural Zone. Nevertheless, it is within the National Park. The statutory purposes of National Parks are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area, and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas by the public. There is also a duty to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities. Paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) explains that great weight should be given

to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, which have the highest status of protection in this respect.

6. The site lies within the Limestone Village Farmlands area of the White Peak as identified in the Authority's Landscape Character Assessment, 2009 (the LCA). This area is described as a gently undulating plateau. Key characteristics include the pastoral farmland enclosed by drystone walls built from limestone, and discrete limestone villages and clusters of stone dwellings. Field sizes are generally small to medium although narrow fields are present in certain areas reflecting piecemeal enclosure of strips in the former open fields from late medieval times onwards. The settlement pattern tends to be strongly nucleated, with most farmsteads and dwellings concentrated in villages. There are many narrow lanes serving the villages and more isolated buildings which are often bounded by stone walls.
7. To achieve the overall strategy for the White Peak area, the LCA identifies that the priority for the Limestone Village Farmlands is to protect the historic pattern of enclosure, the nucleated settlement pattern and the integrity and setting of traditional buildings, whilst restoring the biodiversity of the pastoral farmland within a sustainable farming system.
8. These landscape characteristics are apparent at the site and surrounding area. Middleton By Youlgrave sits in an expansive undulating agricultural landscape. It is a nucleated village centred on a central square with a number of narrow roads leading out from it. It is traditionally an agricultural village, and this is still apparent with grazing livestock and a number of farms on the village edges. Fields surrounding the village are relatively small in size and are generally bounded by limestone walls.
9. The countryside surrounding the village is important to its setting. This is apparent in the boundary of the Conservation Area which includes areas of countryside comprising fields bounded by stone walls, contributing to its rural character. A key contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is the relationship between the village and the surrounding countryside, reflecting the area's farming legacy and contributing to its significance.
10. The fields to the south of Greencroft Farm, including the site, contribute to the agricultural character of the village. They provide a setting to the village when viewed from the south and open up views of the countryside beyond. The site therefore makes an important contribution to the landscape character of the area and the significance of the Conservation Area.
11. Land levels rise from the north to the south and so the site sits at a higher level to the built-up area of the village. Although the scheme does not involve any buildings, it nevertheless introduces development onto what is an open undeveloped field. Longer distance views of the site are limited. However, the development will have a significant visual presence when viewed from the village, including from the area around the central square. The site appears separate from the existing cluster of buildings at the farm. As such the development does not sit comfortably with the existing compact development pattern. Furthermore, it introduces development into sensitive views from within and towards the Conservation Area that affect the open, agricultural characteristics of the site and truncate views of the countryside beyond. The general activities associated with the caravans/motorhomes will exacerbate the

effects of the development, further eroding the open, agricultural characteristics of the site. The development will not maintain a sense of openness, nor will it integrate appropriately with the character and appearance of its surroundings.

12. Given that the site sits at a higher level than the farm buildings, these do not provide a backdrop for the development that would adequately mitigate its effects. From the information submitted, the pitches are used seven months of the year, and this would be mainly when the trees are in leaf. Whilst trees may help filter views of the site from certain vantage points, it would nevertheless remain prominent in views from within the Conservation Area and surrounding area, partly due to its open and elevated position.
13. The appellant proposes a native species planting scheme to help screen the site. However, given that an important characteristic of the site to both the wider landscape of the area and the Conservation Area is its openness, a landscaping scheme designed to screen the development would not provide appropriate mitigation.
14. I appreciate the aim of the development in providing an additional source of income to the farm, and the importance this has played in helping to sustain the farm business. The development generates economic and social benefits, and its general principle accords with local and national policy objectives to support tourism within the National Park and diversification of agricultural businesses. However, by virtue of resulting in an incongruous development within an essentially natural and open site which contributes positively to the landscape character of the National Park, the development has a harmful effect on its landscape character and special qualities.
15. National Parks have two purposes and there is a need to achieve a balance between these. However, as set out in Policy GSP1 of the CS, where there is a conflict between these purposes, priority will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the National Park.
16. For the same reasons as set out above, the development has a harmful effect on the significance of the Conservation Area. In terms of the Framework, I assess the harm as less than substantial, given that its significance would remain largely intact. Even so, Framework paragraph 199 directs me to give 'great weight' to the conservation of such an asset. Paragraph 200 of the Framework sets out how any harm should require 'clear and convincing justification'. Paragraph 202 of the Framework further advises that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
17. Public benefit stems from the provision of holiday accommodation as it draws in tourists and consequential spending to the National Park and therefore some support to the local economy and employment. Public benefit may also stem from the income generated in supporting farming operations which contribute to the area's agricultural landscape, although no details have been provided on how the income is used to sustain the farm operation. Due to the scale of the development, these public benefits will be quite modest and attract commensurate weight. They do not represent 'clear and convincing justification' for harm to or loss of significance of the designated heritage asset, as required by paragraph 200 of the Framework.

18. The development causes harm to the landscape character of the area. Accordingly, it conflicts with Policies L1 and RT3 of the CS and Policies DMR1 and DMC3 of the Development Management Policies Part 2 of the Local Plan for the Peak District National Park, adopted 2019 (the DMP). Collectively, these policies seek to ensure that development conserves and enhances valued landscape character and valued characteristics and the visual amenity of the landscape, and that touring camping and caravan sites should be well screened and not dominate its surroundings, amongst other matters. The development also conflicts with the guidance in section 15 of the Framework, the most relevant of which is summarised above.
19. The development does not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area and causes harm to its significance. Consequently, it conflicts with Policy L3 of the CS and Policies DMC3 and DMC8 of the DMP. These policies do not permit development where it is likely to cause harm to the significance of any cultural heritage assets, other than in exceptional circumstances; require applications for development in a conservation area to clearly demonstrate how its character or appearance and significance will be preserved or enhanced; and require development to respect, protect and where possible enhance cultural heritage that contributes to the distinctive sense of place. It also conflicts with the guidance in section 16 of the Framework, the most relevant aims of which are summarised above.

Other Matters

20. I note the lack of objection to the development and the support of the parish council. However, this does not outweigh the harm I have identified.
21. The appellant states that no landscape impact concerns were raised about the application for the agricultural buildings at the farm. I do not have the details of this proposal. However, from what I observed, the existing agricultural buildings are viewed as part of the village and do not disrupt its nucleated character. The landscape effects of the existing agricultural buildings therefore appear to be different from the appeal scheme. Consequently, I cannot draw any direct comparisons that would weigh in its favour.

Conclusion

22. The development conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole, as well as the Framework. There are no material considerations worthy of sufficient weight that indicate the decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

F Wilkinson

INSPECTOR