



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 April 2022

by Hannah Ellison BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 June 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/L3245/W/21/3289060

Gretton Mill Stackyard, Gilberries Lane, Gretton, Cardington, Shropshire SY6 7HZ

- 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 Frank Evans against the decision of Shropshire Council.
 - The application Ref 20/01280/FUL, dated 23 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 16 June 2021.
 - The development proposed is the change of use from horse paddock to rural holiday park at Gretton Mill Stackyard.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are a) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and b) whether the proposal is in a suitable location with regard to the spatial strategy of the development plan.

Reasons

3. The appeal site forms part of a larger field on the western side of Gilberries Lane. It is currently used for the keeping of horses and there are ancillary buildings, including a stable block, adjacent to the appeal site.

Character and appearance

4. The immediate area has a strong rural character, predominantly consisting of vast expanses of undulating fields intersected with woodlands, narrow lanes, farmsteads, dispersed traditional buildings and settlements of limited size. The open and undeveloped nature of the appeal site and the wider network of fields contribute positively to this character. These features, and the tranquil and unspoilt atmosphere they collectively create, also contribute to the special qualities of the AONB, in which the appeal site is located. The Framework advises that great weight is to be afforded to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of AONBs.
5. The appellant suggests that the proposal will be seen alongside the existing buildings. Nevertheless, I note that the topography of the surrounding area is varied and the land around the appeal site slopes, which would result in the proposed development being sited on higher and more prominent land than that immediately to the west. The trees to the north and west do not comprise

particularly mature woodland and would not prevent views of the appeal site from the hills beyond. As such, the proposed introduction of static caravans, regardless of their colour or low heights, and the expanse of hardstanding would be readily apparent from far reaching vantage points and appear in stark contrast to the surrounding open and rural setting.

6. When the proposed holiday park would be occupied, it would result in the increased presence of vehicles and ancillary paraphernalia typically associated with holidaying. Even when under occupied, or not at all, the intrusive hardstanding and caravans would remain. The small size of the site, combined with the total extent of development, would appear cramped compared to the vast expanses of open fields in the surrounding locality.
7. I note that the existing hedgerow along the highway is dense, however this coverage would not be guaranteed in perpetuity. The caravans would be sited very close to the hedge and their presence, and that of people holidaying, may still be felt through glimpses through the hedge and also from the proposed vehicular entrance. This would interrupt the tranquil character of the area. Similarly, the proposed landscaping would not fully assist in preventing views of the development, due to the topography of the surrounding landscape.
8. Consequently, the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area, including the special qualities of the AONB. It therefore conflicts with policies CS5, CS6, CS16 and CS17 of the Shropshire Local Development Framework: Adopted Core Strategy (March 2011) (the CS), policies MD2, MD11 and MD12 of the Shropshire Council Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan (December 2015) and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in so far as they seek to ensure that developments respect and enhance the character of the countryside.

Site location

9. The appeal site is within an open countryside location and Policy CS5 of the CS seeks to strictly control new development in rural areas to those which maintain and enhance countryside vitality and character, and where they improve the sustainability of rural communities by bringing local economic and community benefits. The policy goes on to list a number of proposals which could be permissible, including small-scale new economic development diversifying the rural economy and sustainable rural tourism and leisure and recreation proposals which require a countryside location, the latter also being subject to CS Policies CS16 and CS17.
10. Policy CS16 places an emphasis on supporting a number of tourism, culture and leisure related developments which includes, amongst others, development of high quality visitor accommodation in accessible locations served by a range of services and facilities, which enhances the role of Shropshire as a tourist destination to stay. It goes on to note that these types of proposals must be of an appropriate scale and character for their surroundings, be close to or within settlements, or an established and viable tourism enterprise where accommodation is required.
11. Policy MD11 of the SAMDev supports the delivery of Policy CS16 by providing more detailed guidance around tourism facilities and visitor accommodation. It

also notes that proposals must meet the relevant considerations within Policy CS5.

12. Collectively, these policies reflect the aims of the Framework with regards to supporting a prosperous rural economy through enabling sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside. The Framework recognises that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. However, it goes on to note that it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable. The use of sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.
13. The appeal site is located a considerable distance from the nearest settlements of Gretton and Cardington. Gretton does not have any shops or services and facilities in Cardington are limited to a single public house. The nearest settlement with a range of services appears to be Church Stretton, which is a significant distance from the appeal site. Whilst some visitors to the proposed development may walk the lengthy distances to these and other settlements, it is likely that the majority would have to rely heavily on private vehicle to access shops and services in Church Stretton. The poor relationship to nearby settlements, the lack of shops and services and the reliance on private motor vehicle would fail to improve the sustainability of the rural community in this instance.
14. The appellant has suggested that the proposed development is linked to the existing equine facility within the wider site and that the accommodation would assist in the retention and expansion of that business, for which there is support in Policies CS5 and CS16. However, there is limited information before me to indicate how the existing facilities are an established tourism enterprise, such as the services which are available at the site, opening times etc and I did not observe any tourist information or facilities during my site visit.
15. Furthermore, it is not clear whether future users of the proposed development would be restricted to solely those visitors who would avail of the services of the equine facility. This raises considerable doubt as to whether the facility is an existing tourism enterprise, the extent to which the proposal would assist the business to diversify and whether ancillary accommodation is required for this use. I therefore afford this matter limited weight.
16. I note there is a caravan site, known as Upper Farm, located near to the appeal site. From the limited information provided, it seems to me that a caravan site existed at that site prior to the approval of its proposed expansion. Furthermore, the Council indicate that, at the time of making its decision, Cardington had facilities and services and there was a bus stop close to the caravan site. Therefore, this example does not appear to be directly comparable to the appeal proposal and thus I afford this matter limited weight.
17. Accordingly, although within the policy context rural development may be permissible, the appeal site is not well served and is in an inaccessible location thus the proposal is contrary to Policies CS5 and CS16 of the CS, Policy MD11 of the SAMDev and the Framework. Collectively these policies seek, amongst other things, to ensure that developments are appropriately sited in terms of

accessibility. My finding of harm to the character and appearance of the area also results in conflict with these policies in this regard.

Other Matters

18. The appellant suggests that there is a need for caravan sites across the country since the Covid-19 pandemic, however no detailed information is provided. I nevertheless acknowledge that the proposal would provide an opportunity for people to access and holiday in rural environs, but as the development is of relatively small scale I attribute these benefits limited weight overall.
19. The Council did not refuse the proposed development based on its effects on highway safety, ecology and the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. A lack of harm on these grounds is neutral in the planning balance.
20. There are nearby heritage assets, but in light of my decision on the appeal overall, no harm to their significance would arise.

Conclusion

21. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole, and in the absence of material considerations to indicate otherwise, the appeal is dismissed.

H Ellison

INSPECTOR