

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 July 2022

by C McDonagh BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18th July 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/21/3289714

Land East of Leek Road, Wetley Rocks, Nr. Stoke-on-Trent ST9 0AY

- 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 Stonier (JS Farming) against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
 - The application Ref SMD/2021/0374, dated 8 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 1 December 2021.
 - The development proposed is erection of agricultural building for use for lambing, storage of feed, hay and implements and construction of new vehicular access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal site is located within the Green Belt. A previously dismissed appeal¹ for a larger agricultural building at the same location and the planning application subject to this appeal both concluded that the proposal was not inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Based on the evidence before me I have no reason to disagree with these findings and have considered the appeal on the basis of the reason for refusal given in the decision notice.

Main Issue

3. Based on the above, the main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises agricultural land located off Leek Road. The site is partially screened by trees lining the road while there is a woodland belt to the east as the land rises. Generally speaking, the area is of rural character, with only isolated farmsteads punctuating agricultural land located between several small settlements, including Wetley Rocks to the north.
5. The proposed building has been reduced in size following a previously refused planning application and dismissed appeal, from 459m² in area and 7.8m height to 275m² and 5.96m height. Furthermore, the materials have been amended to include Yorkshire boarding over concrete panels from the previous metal cladding. Vehicular access is also proposed from Leek Road which includes a new field opening, a track leading towards the building, and a

¹ APP/B3438/W/20/3262718

collection yard and areas to the side and rear all formed of Bitumen Bound Limestone.

6. I have been provided with evidence of the appellant's ownership of the flock and its number, and as such I have no reason to doubt the need for the building. The efforts made to reduce the size of the building and amend the materials result in a structure which is typical of its function and this design is commonplace on agricultural land nationwide. Accordingly, the building itself would not appear at odds with the rural character of the area, while its location in the southern area of the field would appear largely parallel to the buildings of Highfields Farm on the other side of Leek Road.
7. However, the new field access, track, yard area and curtilage would require a substantial amount of hardstanding. This would introduce a stark, urbanising feature to the local landscape and appear highly incongruous set against the prevailing rural character of the appeal site and local area. Although additional landscaping is proposed to screen the proposal from views along Leek Road, any new planting would take some time to mature and establish itself. In the meantime, the harm caused by the hardstanding would be evident in the area. Although I appreciate the existing field opening to the northwest was ruled out due to the longer section of track it would require to reach the building, this does not lessen the harm I have identified to the proposed expanse of hardstanding.
8. Based on the foregoing, the proposal would detract unacceptably from the character and appearance of the area, in conflict with Policies SS1, SS10, DC1 and DC3 in the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (adopted September 2020), which, among other things, seeks development that respects and retains the distinctive character and quality of the landscape and natural environment in the district.

Other Matters

9. The Council has not identified any issues with regard to highway safety as it relates to the vehicular access, nor are there any concerns of biodiversity impacts from the building. However, the absence of harm does not weigh in favour of the scheme. Rather, this would be neutral in the planning balance.
10. I understand the appellant's desire to grow their business, and the proposal is seen as a vital component of these plans as it would enable the farming practices at the site to operate more efficiently. Indeed, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) recognises through paragraph 84 the importance of the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings. However, this support is not unconditional, or at the expense of ensuring that all development integrates appropriately with its surroundings. This is emphasised in paragraph 174 of the Framework, which highlights the importance of planning decisions recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Given the harm I have identified to the character and appearance of the area, the proposal therefore cannot be supported in its current form.

Conclusion

11. The proposal would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no material considerations that indicate the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C McDonagh

INSPECTOR