



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 July 2022

by **O Marigold BSc DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3rd August 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/P1133/W/22/3296003

Cofton Country Holiday Park, Cofton Lane, Cofton, Starcross, Devon EX6 8RP

- 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 Jeffrey of Cofton Country Holiday Park against the decision of Teignbridge District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00298/FUL, dated 4 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 25 October 2021.
 - The development proposed is construction of compound for the secure storage of caravans; construction of compound for the storage of liquified petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders; construction of waste compactor foundations and recycling storage compound; construction of building for storage and for the provision of staff facilities, offices and storage; construction of building for the storage, repair and maintenance of works vehicles and machinery; construction of new vehicular access to serve the development together with construction of vehicle wash-down and hard standing, provision of drainage infrastructure and landscaping.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The site consists of a sloping agricultural field, bounded on all sides by hedgerows and crossed by power cables. It has direct access off Orchard Lane, opposite an entrance to the Cofton Country Holiday Park (CHP) but is separated from this by Orchard Lane and fields. The site and its surroundings have an attractive and rural appearance and are within an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), reflecting their locally recognised high scenic quality and sensitivity.
4. The Teignbridge District Landscape Character Assessment 2009 (LCA) identifies the key characteristics of the Exe Estuary and Farmlands landscape, within which the site sits. The LCA refers to the importance of conserving the landscape's expansive views and the setting of Dawlish. It identifies the pressure of new leisure and recreational development on the landscape, stating that development should be sensitive to its location and reflect the rural character of local lanes.

5. Immediately adjacent to the site is the Dawlish Country Park (DCP). This consists of former agricultural land, now used as Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space, I understand to mitigate the residential expansion of Dawlish. DCP is an open landscape with a rural character and wide views. I saw that it is well used for recreation and by dog-walkers.
6. The appellants have produced a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA), and a subsequent Landscape Statement (FDLS). The FDLS identifies that the AGLV is a farmed landscape that covers a large part of the District. It is common ground between the main parties that, in the wider landscape, the development would be reasonably well assimilated and would be visible only from a limited number of public viewpoints, many at distance, with effects felt mainly at local level, particularly from DCP and Orchard Lane.
7. Some close views of the site from DCP would be filtered by existing hedgerows and the proposed buildings have been designed to minimise their impact, being agricultural in appearance with a low profile and clad in timber. Furthermore, not all of the site would be developed, with its southerly portion being retained as grass and a swale feature.
8. Nevertheless, the proposal would involve large structures, a widened entrance, extensive hard surfacing, rows of caravans, compounds and tall security fencing which would result in a utilitarian, urban form of development that would contrast sharply with the soft and agricultural character of the existing field.
9. The built-up parts of the proposal would be particularly visible from sections of the perimeter and internal paths within DCP, including LVA Viewpoints 3 and 4, and Viewpoints 7 and 8 on its higher slopes. The LVA states that there would be adverse, direct effects from these viewpoints, which would be moderate or moderate-minor in nature. However, given the acknowledged high sensitivity of the landscape and the number of users of the DCP, in my view the magnitude of receptors is large (rather than medium as in the LVA), and the importance from these Viewpoints would be more significant, resulting in adverse effects of major importance.
10. Viewed from Orchard Lane, the proposal would involve security fencing but behind planted banks which would provide some screening. Nevertheless, the proposal would still be visible from the Lane, particularly from the widened access, which would be necessary to provide greater visibility splays. The LVA anticipates an adverse effect but one of minor importance. I concur with this assessment, but the effect of the proposal viewed from Orchard Lane and on its rural character would still cause additional, albeit moderate harm to the landscape.
11. The landscape has been diluted to some extent by urban buildings, as well as agricultural and other recreational development. Nevertheless, in the direction of the site when viewed from DCP, the landscape remains predominantly agricultural and scenic. The existence of some urban and other development only makes it more important to carefully control new development, to maintain the features identified by the LCA, and the scenic and farmed nature of the AGLV. Whilst providing a buffer, DCP does not cover all of the countryside around Dawlish and so cannot be relied upon to preserve the landscape setting of the town.

12. The proposed landscaping would include the retention and significant enhancement of hedgerows, banks and trees within and around the site, to mitigate its impact. The overhead cables would be routed underground providing some visual benefit. Even so, the FDLS accepts that all visual effects cannot be ameliorated, particularly in the short-term, and in winter when leaf coverage is reduced. I agree with this view and consider that the landscaping would not overcome the intrusive harm to the landscape and to the rural character of Orchard Lane that would be caused by the proposal.
13. There would still be longer distance, extensive views available from DCP. However, within those views and at a local level, despite the mitigation, the proposal would appear as an isolated urban element in a landscape that remains largely undeveloped. For the reasons I have already given, its built-up form would appear out of place, having a detrimental effect on the AGLV and its landscape character when viewed from DCP and Orchard Lane, and eroding the rural setting of Dawlish.
14. As such, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore be contrary to Policies EN2A and S2 of the Teignbridge Local Plan 2013-2033, adopted May 2014 (TLP). These require that development should conserve and enhance the qualities, character and distinctiveness of the natural landscape, particularly within the AGLV. It would similarly conflict with the guidance in the LCA and in the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework), to protect and enhance valued landscapes.

Other Matters

15. TLP Policy EC11 provides support, in principle, for the expansion and improvement of tourism accommodation outside settlement limits. TLP Policy S12 also supports lengthening the tourist season and enhancement of existing accommodation.
16. CHP is described as a longstanding and successful business. It is seeing an increase in staycation-type holidays and seeks to improve its visitor offer. Currently, back-of-house facilities such as housekeeping and maintenance for the grounds and buildings are dispersed across the site and beyond. The limited space has resulted in conflict with other servicing activities and the potential to disrupt guests.
17. The construction of centralised and purpose-built works facilities would facilitate the efficient and discreet operation of CHP. It would also provide more space including for staff welfare and avoid the risk from crossing the A379 to access off-site parts of the operation. The proposed caravan storage area would increase the range of services and reduce congestion and pollution from caravan owners who would otherwise have to transport their vehicles to and from the site. It would also encourage more frequent use of the caravans.
18. A number of alternative locations for the proposal within the main part of the CHP site have been suggested by the Council. However, these have been discounted by the appellant for various reasons, including on grounds of landscape impact, and it is for CHP to determine the best use of its holiday park. There is no planning policy requirement to look at alternative sites; and nor does the absence of a clear alternative necessarily make the proposal acceptable. No undue adverse effects have been identified in respect of

highways, heritage or living conditions and these matters are essentially neutral in the planning balance.

19. The proposal would bring essentially commercial advantages to CHP, but would also help the local economy throughout the year, resulting in wider public benefits to which I give moderate weight, bearing in mind the compliance with and broad support from TLP policies EC11 and S12. It would also provide additional habitats for bats, birds and dormice and I attach limited further weight to this benefit.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

20. I have given careful consideration to the benefits of the proposal but conclude that the harm to the character and appearance of the area would be significant and would outweigh the benefits including in respect of TLP policies EC11 and S12. As such, it would conflict with TLP policies S1 and S22 which promote the enhancement of tourist accommodation, including in countryside locations, but subject to the effect on the landscape and local distinctiveness.
21. I have already found that the proposal would conflict with TLP Policies EN2A and S2. Similarly, the proposal would be contrary to the guidance in the Framework that rural tourism developments should be enabled where they respect the character of the countryside.
22. For the reasons given, there would be conflict with the Development Plan, read as a whole. No material considerations have been shown to have sufficient weight to warrant a decision otherwise than in accordance with it. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

O Marigold

INSPECTOR