



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 September 2022

by A Hickey MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 October 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/K0235/W/22/3291433

Bartlemas Farm Office, High Street, Bedford, Pavenham MK43 7PE

- 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 Thomas Beazley (Beazley and Son) against the decision of Bedford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/02471/FUL, dated 10 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 10 January 2022.
 - The development proposed is a change of use and conversion of a cattle livestock barn into a single holiday accommodation unit. Revised application to improve access, turning and parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appellant refers me to the Draft Pavenham Neighbourhood Plan (the NP) dated December 2020. However, this is not at an advanced stage, and I have not been provided details to say there are no outstanding objections; I have therefore afforded this minimal weight.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and;
 - Whether the site would be a suitable location for holiday accommodation, with regards to the spatial strategy for the area.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The area surrounding the appeal site has a strong rural character, largely comprising agricultural land but with some well-established woodland areas close by. Buildings and dwellings exist in the nearby landscape, many of which are not visible from the appeal site given the dense woodland and high hedging. Access to the appeal site is via an existing track, and a public right of way runs along the rear of the building. The large area of open land and mature trees and hedges results in the area having a verdant and rural appearance and character.
5. Whilst an agricultural opening exists, the appeal site is largely restricted from view along High Street by mature hedges and trees. The existing brick and tile-

built barn, which is in good order, is in keeping with the agricultural setting. Mature hedgerows and trees are located on the west and eastern boundary of the barn with the remainder of the appeal site being an open field. The largely undeveloped nature and well-maintained agricultural barn make a positive contribution to the rural character and appearance of the area.

6. The proposed external alterations to the barn would alter the character of the building on its front elevation and roof slope with the insertion of roof lights, doors and windows. I find that the building would largely retain its rustic, agricultural appearance, particularly, as matching brick and hardwood are proposed.
7. Due to its position, an extensive swathe of track, is required from High Street to the appeal building and a relatively large turning and car parking area. The existing woodland would do little to mitigate or soften the appearance of the proposed track given its distance, particularly in the winter months when not in leaf. The expanse of track and parking area would be readily apparent from the opening off High Street and appear in stark contrast to the surrounding open and rural setting.
8. Additionally, the proposal would introduce built form by urbanising the current rural appearance of the site. The proposed holiday accommodation, new access, parking area, servicing requirements and garden paraphernalia that would likely be associated with the proposal (such as, waste/refuse collection, garden furniture, and parked cars) would result in a domestic appearance that would severely diminish the rural qualities of the site and its surrounding. Although some elements would be contained within the site boundaries to the front of the barn away from public view, its visual effect would not complement the surrounding rural landscape and would erode the largely undeveloped qualities of the site.
9. Furthermore, from the evidence before me and my observations the appeal site is directly adjacent to a public right of way (PROW). Indeed, during my visit, I observed that there appeared to be a well-worn path close to the appeal site which was in use by members of the public. Consequently, I consider that the proposal would be highly visible to users of the PROW who would be adversely affected by the proposals effect on the rural setting of the area.
10. For the above reasons, the scheme would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. The proposal conflicts with Policies 28S, 29 and 7S of the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 (2020) (LP). Amongst other things, these policies seek to ensure, high-quality development which contributes to the character and identity of the area. The proposal would also conflict with the provisions of paragraph 130 of the Framework, which seeks to ensure that development is sympathetic to local character.

Suitable location

11. The appeal site is situated on the eastern edge of the village of Pavenham. Its built-up area is concentrated around High Street and Church Lane. Heading east along High Street the character of the village noticeably alters to a rural and sporadically developed environment. Here is where the Settlement Policy Area (SPA) limits of the village terminate. The site lies beyond the SPA limits and is therefore within the countryside.

12. From the evidence before me, both main parties, now agree that it is not necessary for development to be in compliance with Local Plan Policy 76 that appears to relate to new buildings, in order to be considered acceptable by LP Policy 65 concerning the reuse of existing ones. Compliance with Policy 65 would also facilitate compliance with Policy 7S that governs the overall principle of development in the rural area.
13. As the barn is redundant the proposal would be compliant with criteria i. of Policy 65. However, as I have found above, whilst the external works would not harm the appearance of the barn, there would not be an enhancement to the immediate setting of the area. I find the provision of bat and bird boxes and maintenance of the pond for swimming would also offer no enhancement to the immediate setting of the area. The appeal proposal would therefore be in conflict with Criteria vii and viii of Policy 65 that require an enhancement of the immediate setting, and any extension or alteration to not increase the impact on the site/use on the surrounding countryside. As a result, the proposal would conflict with LP Policy 65 when considered as a whole.
14. I therefore conclude that the appeal site would not be a suitable location for holiday accommodation having regard to the spatial strategy for the area and there are no exceptions or identified policies that would permit holiday accommodation in this location. It would conflict with Policies 3S, 7S, 28S, 29 and 65 of the Local Plan which amongst other things, seek to ensure the development would enhance the immediate area and contribute to the structure, form and character of the area.

Other Matters

15. My attention has been drawn to other holiday let schemes granted by the Council. I have considered the evidence presented in relation to these schemes. Nevertheless, from the officer's report in relation to a scheme at The Grove, Stagsden¹, I note it was to incorporate the use of an existing site access and informal parking was already available. The other example² was for works previously carried out and sought amendments to a scheme that had previously been permitted and I have little evidence of the original condition of that site. They are therefore materially different to the appeal before me, which would introduce a harmful urbanising form of development into the countryside.
16. The appellant suggests that there is a need for holiday sites in this location, even more so since the Covid-19 pandemic. However, much of the robust evidence presented predates the LP adopted in 2020. The appellant's evidence provided, post the adoption of the LP, is predominately focused on the short-term post-pandemic period to which I attached limited weight. There is nothing before me to show there is an unmet need for this type of accommodation in the immediate area. I nevertheless acknowledge that the proposal would provide an opportunity for people to access and holiday in rural locations, but as the development is of relatively small scale I attribute these benefits limited weight overall.
17. There was no objection from the Parish Council. There would be benefits including additional spending and jobs for the local economy in this rural

¹ Ref: 20/00714/FUL

² Ref 20/00008/FUL

setting including future occupiers using the public house, farm shop as well as nearby golf and fishing facilities. Indeed, the Framework supports a prosperous rural economy. Nevertheless, one additional holiday unit would make a limited difference to the rural economy overall.

18. The appellant's appeal statement indicates that the development plan is out of date and a review of it has commenced. However, this is unsubstantiated by detailed evidence as to why the plan should be considered as such or what the implications may be for my Decision. Therefore, I attribute little weight to this suggestion.
19. I have not been provided with any specific detail in relation to the Higher Level Scheme for environmental management noted by the appellant and have therefore attached very limited weight to this matter.
20. I have noted the appellant's comments in relation to officer support prior to a decision being issued. However, that was not the ultimate decision of the Council, nor does it affect the planning merits in relation to this appeal.
21. The appellant has stated that should the appeal fail an application using permitted development rights under Class Q would be submitted. As no Lawful Development Certificate, prior approval, or any other robust evidence which shows how alternative permissible schemes would be directly comparable have been provided I attached limited weight to this potential fallback position.
22. The Council raised no explicit objection to a scheme permitted in 2017 and noted the proximity of the site to the SPA. Nevertheless, it was determined in the context of a different development plan and I have made this decision on the basis of the current policy environment.
23. Additionally, other matters relating to a previous application for the site are not directly comparable to this proposal as the earlier scheme was determined under a previous development plan for the area and incorporated a different access arrangement. While the access proposals might be better than those previously permitted, it would not result in improvements to an existing situation, so is not a particular benefit that would arise from this scheme.

Conclusion

24. The proposed development would conflict with the development plan when taken as a whole and there are no material considerations, either individually or in combination, that outweighs the identified harm and associated development plan conflict.
25. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A Hickey

INSPECTOR