



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 March 2023

by R E Jones BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 April 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/P1615/W/22/3302838

Heath Farm, Ledbury Road, Redmarley GL19 3ND

- 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 Mike Reynolds against the decision of Forest of Dean District Council.
 - The application Ref P1489/21/FUL, dated 13 August 2021, was refused by notice dated 23 March 2022.
 - The development proposed is siting of three log cabins and associated works (farm diversification, holiday use) and removal of open sided pole barns.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue for consideration is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site forms part of a large agricultural field that encompasses a tight cluster of dilapidated barns. There are some farmsteads and a short line of dwellings nearby, yet the area is mainly characterised by rolling pastureland and small woodland belts.
4. The barns are surrounded by pasture, while the field's boundaries are mostly lined by mature trees and hedgerows. There are clear views of the site over the roadside hedge running along the site's eastern boundary from the busy A417, from where the site's context can be appreciated. There are also closer views from the Bridleway to the north west, through an unenclosed gap in the field's boundary. Against the immediate backdrop of soft green spaces and established landscaping, together with surrounding fields and woodlands, the site has an attractive pastoral setting.
5. The proposed cabins would each incorporate three bedrooms and resemble long, single storey structures. They would extend further into the field and be positioned upon the undeveloped pasture to the south and east of the existing barns. The barns would be removed and replaced with a large parking and turning area, that would connect with a newly laid access track leading from the existing gated entrance to the A417. This area would consist of hardcore topped with road plainings.

6. The existing barns are grouped close together. The proposed cabins would have by my estimate a similar combined floor area. However, the cabins have a more spacious arrangement within the site, with all three extending into the existing undeveloped spaces. The sizeable access, parking and turning area would encroach further into the undisturbed pasture to the north and east, while the surface materials proposed would have a harsh and engineered appearance that would erode the site's rural appearance. The intervening spaces between the cabins would also be more intensively used with parked cars, driveways and paraphernalia (e.g. occupier play equipment and outdoor seating) likely to occupy those areas. This would be in stark contrast to the natural spaces around the existing barns. Consequently, the more intensively occupied cabins combined with their expansive layout across a greater portion of the site would reduce the site's openness in spatial terms and significantly harm its pastoral appearance and setting.
7. To screen the cabins and associated land from public viewpoints the appellant proposes to plant new native hedgerows along the site's boundaries. These, along with existing hedgerow along the site's roadside and bridleway boundaries would be kept at a minimum 3m in height.
8. Whilst these features would screen the site somewhat, the proposal would still be visible to users of the A417 through the roadside access, where the encroachment into the vacant areas around the barns would result in it having a more pronounced visual impact compared to the existing buildings. Moreover, the road is higher than the appeal site and in the absence of more details showing how the 3m hedgerow would screen the cabins and associated land I am not convinced that controlling the height of the planting would totally remove the appearance of the proposal, particularly when viewed by receptors within taller/ larger vehicles. Similarly, I have no convincing evidence to demonstrate that horse riders using the adjacent bridleway would not be able to peer over the planting and obtain views. In addition, the boundary proposals shown would be limited to areas around the site, therefore from medium and longer-range views, where there are no detailed proposals to control the height of boundary planting, there would likely be views of the site's altered appearance.
9. The cabins would be clad in timber which according to the local character area extract referred to is typical of buildings in the locality. However, even if the cabins are acceptable in terms of their external finishes this would not overcome the way the scheme encroaches into the site's attractive rural setting.
10. I acknowledge that the existing barns at the site are somewhat run down in terms of their appearance. Nonetheless, large portions of the site convey a natural appearance that associates well with the surrounding pastoral landscape, and the proposal would, through the introduction of holiday accommodation and associated works, harmfully erode those qualities to the detriment of the area's character. Moreover, the fact that the barns on site are currently dilapidated does not provide sufficient justification to allow the development of the scale proposed.
11. In conclusion, the proposal would have an unacceptable effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It would be contrary to Policies CSP.1, CSP.4 and CSP.7 of the Core Strategy Adoption Version (23rd February 2012),

Policies AP.1, AP.4 and AP.5 of the Allocations Plan 2006 to 2026, adopted June 2018 and 6b of the Forest of Dean District Council's Landscape Character Assessment. Collectively, these require proposals, amongst other things, to improve the environmental conditions of the area, take account of local character and distinctiveness, be visually attractive, and be an appropriate use for the site. It would also fail to align with the National Planning Policy Framework, where it requires schemes to be sympathetic to local character including landscape setting, while conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Other Matters

12. The planting of additional native hedgerow as well as the incorporation of habitat features around the site, would lead to some biodiversity benefits. Yet, without any specific details of the net biodiversity gain derived from those proposals I can only give moderate weight to them as scheme benefits. Accordingly, this matter would not outweigh the significant harm I have found in respect of the main issue.
13. Likewise, whilst I appreciate there would be some economic uplift for the farm as well as increased spending in the locality, I have no specific details of how many jobs the proposal would create or the forecasted income that could be derived. On this basis I can only give minor weight to the claimed economic benefits for the farm and locality, which would be insufficient to outweigh the harm I have judged to the area's character and appearance.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons given above and having regard to the other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

RE Jones

INSPECTOR