



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 April 2023

by R E Jones BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 June 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/X1118/W/22/3304158

Ocean Pitch Campsite, Moor Lane, Croyde EX33 1NZ

- 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 and Mrs Ben and Louissa Seybold against the decision of North Devon District Council.
 - The application Ref 74974, dated 9 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 26 May 2022.
 - The development proposed is permanent reception building associated with existing campsite to replace portable units.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, having particular regard to the location of the site within the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

3. The appeal site lies within the AONB and in determining the appeal I have had regard to the duty under section 85(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This requires that decisions must have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the special qualities, distinctive character and key features of the AONB. In terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), Paragraph 176 requires great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs.
4. The appeal site comprises a seasonal campsite within a large rectangular field enclosure, on the outskirts of Croyde. Similar enclosures adjoin the site and are occupied in some instances by other campsites. A sewerage works and associated buildings adjoins part of the site's western boundary.
5. The appearance of the appeal site and the adjoining fields is more open and undeveloped during the autumn/winter months when the tourism uses shut down. These qualities contribute to the landscape setting of Croyde and help to separate and reduce the urbanising effect of the different built-up parts of the village. This is clearly depicted in Photo Viewpoint 02 in the appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).
6. Notwithstanding, the presence of the sewerage works to the west, the appeal site and the surrounding land predominantly consists of a pattern of medieval and post-medieval fields. These are distinctive rectangular enclosures that primarily follow the contours of the land and collectively have a unifying presence that

makes a valuable contribution to the landscape setting of Croyde and the special scenic qualities of the AONB.

7. The proposed reception building would be set back into the site and positioned close to its western boundary. It would have a blocky, geometric architectural form that would extend appreciably from the site's western boundary towards its centre. It would be visible from Moor Lane to the south and the elevated footpath leading to Middleborough Hill to the site's north.
8. The scale and permanent nature of the proposed building would encroach unsympathetically into the open, largely undeveloped field and appear discordant in the context of the area's natural setting and historic field pattern. Its appearance would be particularly strident during the winter months when the paraphernalia associated with the campsite use (tents, vehicles, temporary buildings) is removed giving the appeal site a more natural appearance. A permanent building of the scale proposed would also appear out of character in context with the surrounding fields, which are largely undeveloped and devoid of permanent structures.
9. The proposal would be located a short distance from the group of buildings that make up the sewerage works. Despite the proximity of those structures, the sense of visual cohesion between the respective buildings is diminished by the boundary hedge that divides the structures. Moreover, the proposal's projection into the appeal field would, in combination with the existing buildings to the west, unacceptably intensify and elongate the built-form across the area's traditional field pattern, to the detriment of local distinctiveness and character.
10. External finishes include a grass roof and wooden cladding to the proposed building's elevations. The appearance of those finishes would be visually appropriate in this pastoral context. However, the scheme's external finishes would not conceal the building's overall massing, site coverage and geometric form. Moreover, additional landscaping at the site would not fully mitigate the physical scale of the proposal, particularly when viewed from the elevated footpath leading to Middleborough Hill.
11. The existing hardstandings and central gravel track would be replaced with either grass or grasscrete. This would improve the appearance of those somewhat harsh, engineered surfaces, and, to some extent reinstate, the natural appearance of the site. However, those changes would not overcome the harm incurred by the reception building's massing, height and encroaching presence within this largely open and undeveloped site. Similarly, the removal of the chassis supports and temporary washing/reception facilities, although improving the appearance of the site, would not neutralise the reception building's harmful effects.
12. The LVIA concludes that the proposal's adverse effects are limited to localised views. These are nevertheless harmful to the scenic qualities of the AONB and great weight must be given to conserving those characteristics.
13. In conclusion, the proposed reception building would have an unacceptable effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, having particular regard to the location of the site within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It would fail to accord with Policies ST01, ST04, ST09, ST13, DM04 and DM08A of the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan and Policies BE1 and NE1 of the Georgeham Neighbourhood Plan. Amongst other things, these Policies seek to ensure that development contributes positively to local distinctiveness, historic environment and sense of place and conserves the setting and special character and qualities of the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty whilst fostering the social and economic well-being of the area.

Other Matters

14. The replacement of the existing temporary facilities with a more spacious and modern reception building would provide visitors to the site with improved facilities. This could in turn have a positive effect on the visitor experience and encourage more patrons to visit the campsite. However, the scheme benefits should not be at the expense of harming the landscape and visual qualities of the AONB, and in this respect the proposal would have a negative impact.
15. The letters from interested parties in support of the proposal are noted. The case for the proposal includes improved site facilities, more spacious pitches, and its siting next to existing buildings. Those arguments are acknowledged, but they do not outweigh the harm I have found in respect of the main issue, to which I have given great weight. Moreover, the stated "eco-friendly" improvements brought by the proposal have not been clearly quantified or compared with the existing facilities. Accordingly, I can only give limited weight to such benefits.
16. Interested parties indicate that the existing temporary washing and toilet facilities are not suitable for disabled patrons. However, whilst I am sympathetic to this matter, there may be alternative measures that would not cause harm to the AONB. The need for improved facilities for all users is therefore not a justification for permitting something I have found to be unacceptable.
17. The Parish Council response to the application indicated that they would support the scheme in principle. However, they have since had sight of information from the Council's AONB officer that persuades them to raise concerns regarding the effect on the area. Therefore, I have given their comments during the application limited weight in favour of the appeal.
18. I have been referred to a building which the Council approved at the nearby Sun Lifesaving Club. But this would not be comparable to the proposal in terms of its scale, whilst it is in a different location, in so far as it relates to the area's traditional field pattern. On this basis that scheme is not like the one before me and does not justify allowing the appeal.
19. A grade II listed lime kiln located on the north side of Croyde beach, is around 100m to the appeal site's south. The kiln is cut into a dune bank and the undeveloped beach and grassed area to the south and north form an important part of its setting, from where its historical significance can be appreciated. Given the distance between the kiln and the proposal the intervisibility between them would not be perceptible, particularly given the kiln's recessed position, and the intervening landscape features and roadside boundaries along Moor Lane. I am therefore satisfied that the proposal would preserve the listed kiln's character and appearance.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons given above, the proposal would be contrary to the development plan as a whole. There are no material considerations, including the Framework, which indicate that I should take a decision otherwise than in accordance with the development plan in this case. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

RE Jones

INSPECTOR