



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 July 2023

by F Harrison BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 August 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/23/3318276

Hareshaw Linn Caravan Park, Bellingham, Hexham NE48 2DA

- 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 Billy Ward of R Ward Properties Ltd against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 21/04592/FUL, dated 24 November 2021, was refused by notice dated 30 September 2022.
 - The development proposed is demolition of 2 no. youth hostel cabins and erection of 8 no. caravan pitches and children's play area.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The address in the banner heading above is taken from the decision letter as this simply and accurately identifies the site. Nine caravan pitches were originally proposed which was reduced to eight pitches following amendments to the scheme, as such I have taken the description of development from the decision notice.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on the:
 - character and appearance of the area; and
 - living conditions of the occupiers of Bankfoot and Hallam Lodge, with regard to outlook and privacy.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. The appeal site accommodates the existing Hareshaw Linn Caravan Park and a plot of land with a vacant youth hostel, comprising two timber structures. It is located at the entrance to Bellingham on Pennine Way. Next to the former youth hostel site are two dwellings known as Bankfoot and Hallam Lodge and there are dwellings on the opposite side of Pennine Way.
5. Open fields adjacent and opposite the caravan park creates a sense of openness. The pitches in the existing caravan park and the timber structures on the youth hostel site are set back from the road. This creates a spacious and open character with verdant qualities owing to the grass verges, greenery of gardens and established hedgerows and mature trees.

6. In relation to this main issue, the addition of three pitches within the existing caravan park is not in dispute, nor is the proposed children's playground. While the appellant made a number of amendments to the scheme during the determination of the application, the Council's concerns regarding the visual effect of the five pitches on the youth hostel site remain.
7. Development already exists on the youth hostel site, and as a brownfield infill site the principle of development at the site accords with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in this regard. However, despite moving the caravans a short distance away from the site boundary, the layout of the proposal would still bring development closer to the road and closer to Hallam Lodge and Bankfoot such that it would increase the quantum of physical form in the immediate area. While the existing caravan park may be large and established, and there would be a modest increase in pitches overall, the proposal would alter the relationship between open space and structures on the former youth hostel site, eroding the current spaciousness in this section of Pennine Way.
8. The access to the youth hostel site is to be closed, with new tree planting proposed and a close boarded fence to be installed to tie in with the boundary treatment at the existing caravan park and to provide privacy and security. Nevertheless, while partially screened, as shown on the proposed site sections, the caravans would still be visible from Pennine Way and the neighbouring properties. Their siting, closer to the road and the neighbouring dwellings would result in a discernible difference in physical form which would not relate positively to the prevailing character and appearance.
9. The proposal would be especially apparent when viewed on approach from the south owing to the difference in ground levels. The appeal site is on noticeably higher ground and therefore in a prominent position in the street scene. I note that the Council do not have concerns regarding the effect of the proposal on any landscape features and the wider landscape. However, this does not affect by above findings.
10. The current state of disrepair of the timber structures may well detract from the character and appearance of the area, however this does not justify the harm that would arise from the proposed development and in any event, the timber structures are located away from the road and neighbouring properties and are largely screened from view.
11. The appellant has suggested that the wording of Policy QOP1 of the Northumberland Local Plan 2016-2036 (2022) (NLP) appears more focused towards permanent buildings. However, my attention has not been drawn to any words in this policy to demonstrate this, and even though the caravans are temporary structures and could be removed, the harm identified above would still be detrimental.
12. Overall, the proposal would result in unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area, in conflict with policies ECN15, QOP1 and QOP2 of the NLP. Amongst other things, these policies require extensions to existing sites for caravans to be adequately screened, and development proposals to make a positive contribution to, and preserve local character.

Living Conditions

13. Bankfoot and Hallam Lodge are located centrally within generous plots and there is existing development at the appeal site. Amendments have been made to the scheme to reduce its effect on the occupiers of the neighbouring properties and it is not disputed that owing to its siting the children's play area would not give rise to significantly harmful effects on neighbouring occupiers living conditions. Nevertheless, the five proposed pitches on the youth hostel site and pitch 104 within the existing caravan site, which is immediately adjacent to Bankfoot, would bring development closer to the shared boundaries with the neighbouring properties.
14. While partially screened, the caravans along the shared boundary would be visible over the proposed close board timber fence and indicative existing vegetation and proposed additional hedge and tree planting. There may well be no right to a view, and views towards the appeal site are not currently unimpeded. However, the caravans would be located on higher ground to the neighbouring properties and even though only the upper part of the caravans would be seen, they would appear as a dominant feature from these properties.
15. Owing to the difference in ground levels, this would have an overbearing effect that would be detrimental to the levels of outlook that could reasonably be expected from the rear facing rooms of Bankfoot and Hallam Lodge and from their respective private outdoor spaces. While ground levels at pitch 104 are not as high, the proximity to the boundary with Bankfoot would result in a noticeable difference in the physical form, to the detriment of the outlook from the private outdoor space and the windows on the side elevation of this property.
16. A previous planning permission at the youth hostel site for residential development may or may not have had a more imposing height and massing than the appeal proposal. However, the full details of that scheme are not before me, it has since lapsed and I must determine this appeal on its own planning merits.
17. The specifications of the caravans to be installed at the site show windows on the rear elevation. Even if there are no guidelines relating to separation distances set out in policy, the proposal would bring development closer to the boundary with Bankfoot and Hallam Lodge, and the caravans would afford elevated views at close range into the private gardens. While views would only be from the upper part of the windows and would be at an oblique angle, given the proximity, this would negatively affect the privacy of the occupiers of the neighbouring properties.
18. The existing youth hostel structures are in a linear position to Hallam Lodge and have windows directly facing the neighbouring property. However, they are sited further away from the shared boundary and do not undermine the privacy of the occupiers of the neighbouring property in the way the appeal scheme would.
19. As such, the proposal would be unduly harmful to the living conditions of the occupiers of Bankfoot and Hallam Lodge, with regard to outlook and privacy, in conflict with Policy QOP2 of the NLP. This policy includes a requirement for the physical presence and design of development to not have a visually obtrusive or overbearing impact on neighbouring uses and levels of privacy should not be unacceptably harmed in existing neighbouring development.

Other Matters

20. The proposed development is for an extension to an existing visitor accommodation site located within a service centre and would support sustainable growth in rural tourism. This economic benefit attracts limited weight. The provision of a children's play area would increase recreational opportunities and while a benefit of the scheme this is of limited weight. The benefits of the scheme do not therefore outweigh the harm I have identified above on the main issues to which I attach considerable weight.
21. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. While I note that the Council did not make reference to the Framework in their reasons for refusal, the decision notice clearly articulated why the proposal was considered unacceptable and which development plan policies it was in conflict with.

Conclusion

22. My above findings bring the proposal into conflict with the development plan, read as a whole. There are no material considerations that have been shown to have sufficient weight to warrant a decision otherwise than in accordance with it. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

F Harrison

INSPECTOR