



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 August 2023

by M Aqbal BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 September 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/22/3304183

The compound area at Wadlow Farm, Balsham, Cambridge CB21 4HH

- 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 Andrew and Jamie Hamilton, Greenlock Self Storage Limited against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 22/01331/FUL, dated 18 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 10 June 2022.
 - The development proposed is the change of use of an existing compound area into a self-storage facility and the positioning of 90 shipping containers.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the change of use of an existing compound area into a self-storage facility and the positioning of 90 shipping containers at the compound area at Wadlow Farm, Balsham, Cambridge CB21 4HH in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 22/01331/FUL, dated 18 March 2022, and the plans and drawings submitted with it, subject to the schedule of conditions attached to this decision.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are: i) Whether the proposed development would be in a suitable location having regard to the development strategy of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) ('LP') and in respect of reducing the need to travel, particularly by car and promoting sustainable travel; and ii) Whether the proposed development would result in the unacceptable loss of lorry parking and facilities for drivers in the area.

Reasons

Suitability of location

3. The appeal site comprises a rectangular area of hardstanding enclosed by a high mesh fence and, in part, landscaping. This is situated immediately west of an established grain storage facility and accessed via a track. This site is not within any identified development framework and consequently for the purposes of the LP is in the countryside.
4. Policy S/7 of the LP states that: 'Outside development frameworks, only allocations within Neighbourhood Plans that have come into force and development for agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation and other uses which need to be located in the countryside or where supported by other policies in this plan will be permitted. The supporting text to this Policy states that the development frameworks define where policies for the built-up

areas of settlements give way to policies for the countryside. This is necessary to ensure that the countryside is protected from gradual encroachment on the edges of villages and to help guard against incremental growth in unsustainable locations. In the countryside development is generally restricted to uses that need to be located there.

5. The appeal site is not allocated within a Neighbourhood Plan and although the proposal may facilitate storage related for agriculture, horticulture, forestry or outdoor recreation, it is not specifically for any of these uses.
6. The appellants' arguments for the need for the proposal to be located in the countryside are largely based on submissions from the Self Storage Association, United Kingdom. Based on these submissions, there would appear to be some unmet and growing demand for self-storage facilities in East Anglia, including in the region of the appeal site, in part, due to the level of development and growth taking place around Cambridge. However, this in itself is not conclusive evidence, that there is a need for a self-storage facility to be located in the proposed countryside location, as opposed to other areas in the district identified in the development framework. I therefore afford this contention limited weight. Despite my findings in respect of LP Policy T1/2, as set out below, which is a generic requirement for all development proposals, I am not persuaded that the proposal is clearly supported by other policies in the LP.
7. Furthermore, it has not been shown that the location of the proposed development accords with LP Policy S/6, which sets out a hierarchical approach to new jobs and housing in the district, with descending order of preference given to the edge of Cambridge, new settlements and only limited development in the rural area.
8. On the basis of the information before me, the proposed development would be entirely dependent on private motorised transport such as cars, vans and lorries. Also, because the self-storage use is likely to require the movement of bulky goods, for practical reasons, this type of use is unlikely to utilise sustainable modes of travel such as cycle, bus and train. Although staff could use such modes of travel, given the modest levels of employment proposed and relative to the trips generated by the proposed use, this is not significant.
9. Despite its countryside location, the appeal site is centrally located in relation to settlements it is anticipated it would serve. In light of this and the appellants' submissions, this would reduce journey and travel times in comparison to the use of similar self-storage facilities which are further away.
10. As such, the proposal, to an extent, would accord with LP Policy T1/2, which includes a requirement that development must be located and designed to reduce the need to travel, particularly by car, and promote sustainable travel appropriate to its location.
11. Nevertheless, because of the site's countryside location, the proposed development would not be in a suitable location having regard to the development strategy for the district as set out in the LP and conflicts with Policies S/6 and S/7.
12. Consequently, the proposal also conflicts with Policy S/3 of the LP, which echoes the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the

National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework'). This seeks to ensure that proposals that accord with the Development Plan are approved wherever possible.

Loss of existing lorry parking and facilities

13. At the time of my visit, the appeal site was not being used for lorry parking or any associated facility. Although my visit represents a snapshot in time, the appellants have confirmed that the lorry parking and facilities were not lawful and that since determination of the planning application these uses have now ceased.
14. Therefore, and in the absence of any information to the contrary, the proposed development would not result in the unacceptable loss of lorry parking and facilities for drivers in the area.
15. As such, I find no conflict with Paragraph 109 of the Framework which states that planning decisions should recognise the importance of providing adequate overnight lorry parking facilities, taking into account any local shortages, to reduce the risk of parking in locations that lack proper facilities or could cause a nuisance.
16. Although the Council's second reason for refusal also refers to Policy TI/3 of the LP, this Policy does not specifically relate to the loss of lorry parking and facilities. Therefore, this Policy is not directly relevant to this main issue.

Other considerations

17. I acknowledge that self-storage facilities which utilise storage containers are likely to be difficult to establish in urban areas as they have to compete with higher value residential and other commercial developments.
18. Furthermore, irrespective of its location, as already stated, due to the nature of the proposed use, this would be largely reliant on private motorised transport. However, on the information available to me, the visits to self-storage facilities are infrequent because this type of facility is more often used by those who have goods they want to store for a period of time and do not require regular access too. For example, people moving house, renovating, storing documents or sporting goods off-season.
19. There are also some site-specific factors which lend support to the proposal. The appeal site is located near to a quarry and grain stores and on the information before me, the proposal would be compatible with these neighbouring uses. Also, because the appeal site is largely screened from the surrounding area by a combination of the existing landform and boundary treatments. This, along with the proposed landscaping would ensure that there would be no harm to the character and appearance of the area.
20. Most notably, on the information before me, the proposal would make use of brownfield land, for which there is national policy support. This, along with the provision of additional landscaping would bring some environmental benefits. There would also be some minor economic benefits through the creation of a small number of jobs and modest social and economic benefits associated with the provision of storage facilities for residents and local businesses, which is likely to support the rural economy and economic growth in general.

21. Consequently, planning permission for the use of the appeal site as a self-storage facility to meet the needs of local residents and businesses would also support the aims of Paragraph 81 of the Framework which states that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

Conditions

22. In considering the suggested conditions, I have had regard to the Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance. I have imposed the standard timescale condition for the implementation of the permission and a condition specifying the relevant plans as this provides certainty.
23. A condition to minimise the disruption caused by construction activity on the highway by requiring this to be undertaken in accordance with the submitted and sufficiently detailed Construction Management Plan is necessary in the interests of highway safety. Similarly, a condition requiring a Traffic Management Plan is necessary in the interests of maintaining highway efficiency and safety when the use is operational.
24. A condition requiring a surface water drainage scheme is necessary to ensure the satisfactory drainage of the site and to prevent the increased risk of flooding.
25. I have imposed conditions requiring a net biodiversity gain and that the development is undertaken in accordance with the ecological measures identified in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. These conditions are necessary to ensure that the scheme protects and enhances the areas biodiversity and ecology. A condition requiring that the external lighting shall be installed and operated in accordance with the details contained in the Lighting Plan (NET LED Lighting, February 2002) which I have found to be acceptable, is necessary to safeguard ecology.
26. To ensure that the proposed development is satisfactorily assimilated with the area and landscape, I have specified a condition requiring details of boundary treatments, including any hedgerow planting and a condition restricting the quantum of storage containers on site. Similarly, to ensure that the development is assimilated with its surroundings, I have specified a condition requiring all the storage containers to be finished in a specific external colour.
27. In the interests of the amenity the surrounding area in terms of noise and light, a condition relating to the days and hours the proposed facility would be open to customers is necessary.
28. Finally, I have specified a condition, that the development shall only operate as a self-storage facility. This is necessary because, I have only found the proposal to be acceptable given its site-specific circumstances and the nature of the proposal.
29. Condition 4 which prevents any development approved from commencing until this has been complied with, is considered fundamental to the development hereby approved. It is necessary for this to take the form of a pre-commencement' condition in order to have their intended effect. Where necessary and in the interests of clarity and precision, I have altered the conditions to better reflect the relevant guidance.

Planning balance and conclusion

30. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that decisions on planning applications should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
31. I have found that the proposed development would not be in a suitable location having regard to the development strategy for the district and therefore conflicts with the requirements of policies of the development plan. Even so, because the appeal site is brownfield land, and the proposed self-storage use is unlikely to utilise the use of sustainable modes of travel, the proposal would result in limited conflict with the overarching aims of some of those policies (S/6 and S/7) with regard to safeguarding the countryside and promoting sustainable travel.
32. Also, I am satisfied that the proposal would not result in the unacceptable loss of lorry parking and facilities for drivers in the area. Furthermore, in light of the other considerations, the proposed development would provide a suitable self-storage facility which would reduce the need to travel.
33. In addition, there would be modest but tangible benefits associated with the reuse of a vacant, brownfield land for a self-storage facility. This would also promote employment growth and development for which there is significant national support.
34. As such, given the particular circumstances of this case there are material considerations which justify a decision other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

M Aqbal

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans: 1234 Wadlow GSS, Proposed site plan, C628/P01, Site Location plan.
- 3) All construction work (including demolition) and construction vehicle movements shall be carried out in accordance with the details contained in the Construction Management Plan (Appendix 03 of the Transport Statement SLR Consulting Limited, February 2022).
- 4) No demolition or construction works shall commence on site until a Traffic Management Plan has been submitted to and agreed in writing with the local planning authority. Thereafter, the development shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved Traffic Management Plan.
- 5) No development above ground level, other than demolition, shall commence until a scheme for the provision and implementation of surface water drainage has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Thereafter, the drainage scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and implementation programme.
- 6) No development above ground level, other than demolition, shall commence until a scheme for biodiversity net gain and a timescale for its implementation shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Thereafter, the approved scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and timescale.
- 7) No development above ground level, other than demolition, shall commence until details of boundary treatments indicating the type, positions, design, maintenance and materials of boundary treatments to be erected, including any hedgerow planting, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Thereafter, the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 8) External lighting shall only be installed and operated in accordance with the details contained in the Lighting Plan (NET LED Lighting, February 2002).
- 9) The development shall be undertaken in accordance with all the ecological measures detailed in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Small Ecology Limited, February 2022).
- 10) All containers on the development site hereby permitted shall be externally coloured in RAL 6005, as shown on drawing no. C628/P-01.
- 11) The development hereby permitted shall not be open to customers outside the hours of 06:00 – 22:00 Monday – Friday, 08:00 – 18:00 on Saturdays and 08:00 – 16:00 on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

- 12) The development hereby permitted shall only operate as a self-storage facility and at no time shall be independently used as the business premises of any other occupier.
- 13) No more than 90 storage containers shall be permitted on the development site.