



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 November 2023

by L C Hughes BA (Hons) MTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7 December 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/L3245/W/23/3320328

Land adjacent to Woodside, Yorton Heath, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 3EU

- 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 Robert Wardle against the decision of Shropshire Council.
 - The application Ref 22/03468/FUL, dated 25 July 2022, was refused by notice dated 17 October 2022.
 - The development proposed is Change of Use of Agricultural Land to a site for two caravans including alterations to existing access, parking and drainage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. In the interests of clarity and conciseness, I have used the site address as given on the appeal form as opposed to that stated on the application form.
3. As is clear from the appellant's submissions (including those made at application stage), the purpose of the proposal is to provide holiday accommodation at the site. I shall consider the appeal on this basis.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - a) whether the appeal site represents a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to relevant provisions of the development plan; and
 - b) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location

5. Policy CS16 of the Shropshire Council Adopted Core Strategy (CS) (March 2011) provides a policy framework for considering proposals for tourism development. It places emphasis on high quality visitor accommodation in accessible locations, and in rural areas the policy requires that proposals must be close to or within settlements, or serve an established and viable tourism enterprise where accommodation is required.

6. The appeal site is located in open countryside outside of any defined development boundary. Although CS Policy CS16 provides no guidance as to the meaning of 'close to a settlement', the site is experienced as divorced from Yorton Heath, a very small settlement that contains no substantive facilities and that is principally comprised of a loose linear row of residential development. Furthermore, the site lies approximately 1 mile from the settlement of Harmer Hill and approximately 1.5 miles from the village of Clive, each of which is small-sized and containing of a narrow range of facilities and services. Further, from my site visit I noted that many of the roads which serve the site are narrow, single width with no street lighting or pavements, which would discourage visitors from walking along them to reach the nearest settlements, especially in poor light. This is even though I understand these routes to be lightly trafficked.
7. The nearest settlements with a wide range of facilities and services on offer include the small market town of Wem, located approximately 5 miles from the appeal site to the north, and the market town of Shrewsbury situated a broadly comparable distance to the south. Visitors would therefore have to take relatively long journeys in order to access a good range of amenities realistically capable of serving their full day-to-day needs. Furthermore, although access is possible by rail via a request stop at Yorton Station, the route from this station to the site is neither short nor geared for movements on foot. Thus, due to the distances involved to reach settlements and the absence of conveniently accessible public transport options, it is to my mind inevitable that the proposal would promote travel by private car.
8. The appeal site is in an attractive setting and a tranquil rural area. From my site visit I could clearly see how holiday makers would find it an attractive place to stay given the landscape and opportunities for walking and cycling nearby. However, whilst the appellant has highlighted that the area is likely to attract walkers and cyclists, and that the proposal envisages cycling tourism, there is no guarantee all future visitors would be of this ilk nor that walkers and cyclists would not, during their stays, place reliance on private car travel to serve their amenities. Moreover, due to the site's location, it is very likely that future occupiers of the proposed holiday caravans would arrive by car and utilise this mode of private transport during the course of their stays.
9. The appellant has stated that there would be a supply of locally sourced provisions to reduce the need for visitors to travel. I have little evidence of what this would entail, and in any case it is likely that visitors would need to supplement these provisions or access additional facilities and services during their holiday, which would be likely to necessitate a car journey.
10. Having regard to the relevant provisions of the development plan, the site does not represent a suitable location for the proposed development and is not required as part of an existing tourism enterprise so as to be in conflict with Policy CS16 of the CS. I also identify conflict with Policy CS5 of the CS insofar as this policy seeks rural tourism and leisure and recreation proposals which require a countryside location to be sustainable. The scheme also conflicts with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which, whilst supporting rural tourism, encourages the use of sites that are physically well-related to settlements where opportunities exist.

Character and appearance

11. The appeal site is located in a tranquil and attractive landscape characterised by undulating open fields, narrow lanes, trees and hedgerows. Whilst the topography of the surrounding area and the presence of existing woodland/planting restricts the proposal's visual envelope, the site is comprised of upward sloping open land adjacent to the property Woodside and is visible, at least in part, from publicly accessible locations to the southeast including from the unclassified road that runs its frontage. This is not withstanding the existence of a mature hedgerow.
12. The hedgerow has a small access point which would need to be widened to accommodate adequate access onto the site and an acceptable visibility splay. This, along with the proposed parking spaces, would detract from the character and appearance of the surrounding area, adding a more urban feel to the site. As the site is sloping the proposed caravans would be elevated above the hedge line, and would be visible, at least in part, from points on the surrounding road network and from neighbouring countryside, representing a prominent intrusion visually out of keeping with the surrounding landscape. This would be the case even should future external lighting be secured via condition. Due to the sloping nature of the site which necessitates the elevated siting of the proposed caravans, planting and landscaping could not realistically offer adequate screening to mitigate this impact. Moreover, any new planting would take time to properly establish and could not fairly be relied upon to provide permanent or robust buffers to views.
13. The proposed development would therefore not be in conformity with CS Policies CS6 and CS17 which seek to ensure that development conserves and enhances the natural environment. It also conflicts with Policies MD2, MD11 and MD12 of the Shropshire Council Site Allocations and Management of Development Plan (December 2015) which together strive to ensure that all developments should enhance natural assets, not have a significant adverse effect on visual amenity and landscape character, and should be well screened and sited. The scheme also conflicts with the Framework insofar as it seeks to ensure that development is sympathetic to local character and recognises the intrinsic and natural beauty of the countryside.

Other Matters

14. I have noted objections/concerns raised by interested parties with respect to matters including highway safety and the effect upon neighbouring living conditions. However, as I have found the proposal to be unacceptable for other reasons, it is not necessary for me to explore such matters further here.

Planning Balance

15. The proposal would benefit the local economy and would provide tourism accommodation which could encourage recreational activities such as walking and cycling. However, any economic, social or environmental benefits to be drawn from the scheme would be relatively modest and would not, in my judgement, outweigh the harm that I have found would be caused to the plan led strategy or the character and appearance of the area.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons that I have set out, I conclude that the proposal would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole and there are no material considerations to indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Therefore the appeal is dismissed.

L C Hughes

INSPECTOR