
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 November 2023

by Alexander O'Doherty LLB (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th December 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/P2114/W/22/3306353

Chequers Inn, Chequers Inn Road, Rookley, Ventnor, Isle of Wight PO38 3NZ

- 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 Mark Holmes against the decision of Isle of Wight Council.
 - The application Ref 21/01238/FUL, dated 8 May 2021, was refused by notice dated 8 March 2022.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as, "Hard standing for touring caravans".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. At the site visit I observed that an area of hardstanding had been laid on site. Nevertheless, I cannot be certain that the development that has been carried out is exactly the same in its entirety as that which has been applied for. Thus, for the avoidance of doubt, this appeal decision only relates to the proposed development as shown on the submitted appeal plans.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, and on the setting and significance of the Grade II listed building, known as Chequers Inn.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site is an open field which is located adjacent to the overspill car park serving Chequers Inn, a roadside public house located at the junction between Niton Road, Chequers Inn Road, and Bagwich Lane. A parking area and an access drive serving Lake Farm Equitation Centre (Lake Farm) are situated immediately to the north-east of the site.
5. I have had regard to the photographs provided by the appellant. I viewed the site from all of the viewpoints plotted on the submitted plan relating to those photographs which were available from public vantage points. I observed that the site is visible from near the entrance to Lake Farm. At the time of my site visit glimpsed views of the site were available in-between the foliage along Chequers Inn Road to the south of Lake Farm. Unobstructed views of the site

are available from Chequers Inn Road next to the part of the overspill car park which adjoins the site.

6. As such, whilst visibility of the site is restricted from further afield, including nearby parts of Niton Road and Bagwich Lane, enough views of the site are available from Chequers Inn Road to appreciate the open and undeveloped nature of the site. The site is sufficiently separated from Chequers Inn and the buildings at Lake Farm such that the site significantly contributes to the rural appearance of the wider area due to the site appearing virtually as part-and-parcel of the broad swathe of fields which forms the backdrop to the site.
7. Whilst not for permanent built development, with no static caravans proposed, the proposed development would, in effect, occasionally infill the site in-between the grounds of Chequers Inn and Lake Farm, through the stationing of touring caravans. Hence, it would erode the open and undeveloped nature of the site at these times.
8. The urbanisation effect caused by the combination of the hardstanding and the presence of up to 12 (potentially large) touring caravans and associated paraphernalia in a close-knit layout would further undermine the site's association with the wider rural appearance of the area, referred to above. This would particularly be the case, as although the touring pitches would potentially be predominantly utilised on a seasonal basis, the site would be open for business all-year round, with the appellant not intending the use to be seasonal.
9. Whilst additional screen planting has been proposed (which could be secured by a planning condition), including a new belt of trees and evergreen species, in all likelihood these features would take a considerable amount of time, potentially years, to fully mature. In the meantime, the harmful impacts identified to the appearance of the area would remain. Reference has been made to static caravan sites at Carters Road in Ryde and Hillway at Bembridge, but few details have been provided to allow a meaningful comparison with the proposed development. Accordingly, none of these matters change my findings on this main issue.
10. I therefore find that the proposed development would have an unacceptable and harmful effect on the appearance of the area. It would conflict with the first paragraph of Policy DM2 of the Core Strategy¹ which provides that, amongst other things, the Council will support proposals for high quality and inclusive design to protect, conserve and enhance our existing environment whilst allowing change to take place. The proposed development would also conflict with paragraph 130 d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which provides that, amongst other things, planning decisions should ensure that developments maintain a strong sense of place.

Listed building

11. The site is located in close proximity to Chequers Inn, a Grade II listed building, and is within its setting. Chequers Inn has been enlarged and modernised over the years. I observed that the significance of the listed building derives in part from its tiled roof, its casement windows, and its overall design which is evocative of a traditional country inn.

¹ Island Plan: Isle of Wight Core Strategy (including Waste and Minerals) and Development Management Development Plan Document (adopted 2012)

12. The setting, which includes the appeal site, although aesthetically altered somewhat by the presence of the existing car park and overspill car park at Chequers Inn and its children's play area / garden and the nearby buildings at Lake Farm, nevertheless provides a strong contribution to the significance of the listed building by its predominantly open and undeveloped nature, which is in keeping with the rural appearance of the wider landscape which Chequers Inn is associated with by way of its architectural design and historic use.
13. Considering the adverse impacts identified on the first main issue above, which include an erosion of the open and undeveloped nature of the site, and an urbanisation effect, the proposed development within the setting of the listed building would undermine the contribution which the setting makes to its architectural and historic interest. This effect would potentially be diminished in the winter months, but as the business would operate all-year round, the extent to which this would be the case is unclear. For these reasons, the significance of the listed building as a designated heritage asset would be harmed by the proposed development within its setting.
14. Given the size of the site, and its visibility from public vantage points referred to in the first main issue above, the harm caused to the significance of the listed building would be localised and therefore less than substantial. Even so, this magnitude of harm is of considerable importance and weight. The harm identified must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposed development.
15. In relation to this, the Core Strategy supports rural tourism development, including Policy SP4 of the Core Strategy which provides that, amongst other things, the Council will support sustainable growth in high quality tourism and proposals that increase the quality of existing tourism destinations and accommodation across the Island, and that the Council also wishes to see the Island become an all-year round tourism destination. The policies quoted by the appellant relating to the emerging Draft Island Planning Strategy (July 2021 version) reflect similar aims. Paragraph 84 c) of the Framework also provides that, amongst other things, planning decisions should enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.
16. The proposed development would diversify the business model of Chequers Inn, by providing income through site fees and potential new visitors to the public house. This income would, in turn, support existing and future employment opportunities at Chequers Inn, with 45 people currently being employed. In this regard, it is recognised that the hospitality industry in general has suffered economically since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and that, added to this, increases in gas and electricity costs, and inflation, have added to the economic pressures faced by rural businesses. I note the Mintel research referred to by the appellant, which highlights an increase in domestic tourism, including camping and caravanning. The proposed development would also provide a base for visitors to access tourist attractions further afield, thereby supporting the wider economy.
17. Nevertheless, few details have been provided to substantiate the scale of any economic benefits which might accrue to either Chequers Inn or the local economy from the proposed development. In particular, no specific figures have been provided to demonstrate the potential effect of the proposed

development on the profits of Chequers Inn, either in the short or the long term. It is not my role to speculate on these matters. Given the limited evidence before me, and noting the strong in-principle policy support for the proposed development in terms of its contribution to the rural economy, no more than moderate weight has been given to the public benefits of the proposed development.

18. The Framework makes clear that great weight needs to be given to designated heritage assets' conservation. With only moderate weight being accorded to the public benefits of the proposed development, these benefits do not outweigh the harm that would be caused to the significance of the listed building.
19. I therefore find that the proposed development would have an unacceptable and harmful effect on the setting and significance of the Grade II listed building, known as Chequers Inn. It would conflict with the first paragraph of Policy SP5 of the Core Strategy which provides that, amongst other things, the Council will support proposals that protect, conserve and / or enhance the Island's historic environments, and with the first paragraph of Policy DM11 of the Core Strategy which provides that, amongst other things, the Council will support proposals that positively conserve and enhance the special character of the Island's historic environment. The proposed development would also conflict with chapter 16 of the Framework which seeks to conserve and enhance the historic environment.

Other Matters and Planning Balance

20. I note that the present scheme differs from that submitted previously, including in relation to the proposed layout for the hardstanding. Nevertheless, as this appeal decision solely relates to the scheme before me, this is a neutral matter, which does not weigh in favour of the proposed development.
21. As mentioned on the second main issue above, few details have been provided to substantiate the scale of any economic benefits which might accrue from the proposed development. Moreover, few details have been provided to illustrate the extent to which the proposed new planting would benefit biodiversity over-and-above the present condition of the site. Hence, based on the evidence before me, I find that none of the other considerations, which include the Framework, indicate that this appeal decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with the development plan.
22. As mentioned in the second reason for refusal given in the Council's decision notice, the Council has raised concerns in relation to potential impacts arising from nitrate enrichment on the Southampton and Solent Waters Special Protection Area. However, as the appeal is being dismissed for other reasons, there is no need to consider the potential implications of the proposed development in this respect. I therefore make no further comments on this matter.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given above, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework, and all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Alexander O'Doherty

INSPECTOR