



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 November 2023

by F Wilkinson BSc (Hons), MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 December 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/F4410/W/23/3320089

Forest View, Doncaster Road, Bawtry, Doncaster DN10 6DF

- 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 Harriet Huddlestone against the decision of Doncaster Council.
 - The application Ref 21/02792/FULM, dated 9 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 6 December 2022.
 - The development proposed is change of use of land for the siting of holiday lodges and holiday park reception, including formation of 1 new access and alteration of 1 existing access, creation of ponds, bunding, landscaping and associated infrastructure.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the appeal site would be an acceptable location for the proposed development having regard to its accessibility, its effect on the character and appearance of the area and whether it is justifiable to support a prosperous rural economy.

Reasons

Policy Context

3. The appeal site is an agricultural field located just beyond a caravan/motorhome sales and storage business and a group of dwellings that are located mainly in a linear form along the A638 within generous plots. A paintball facility is across the A638 from the site. Bawtry lies around 1.7 miles to the south, with Rossington around 3 miles to the north. Bawtry is within the Service Towns and Villages category of the settlement hierarchy defined in Policy S1 of the 2021 adopted Doncaster Local Plan 2015-2035 (the Local Plan), which are described as providing a good range of services meeting their own needs and the local area. Rossington is a Main Town.
4. The site is within the Countryside Policy Area as defined in Policy S1. In such areas, proposals will be supported where they accord with Policy 25 of the Local Plan. Part 4 of Policy 25 sets out the circumstances in which proposals for non-residential development will be supported in the Countryside Policy Area. The supporting text to the policy states that non-residential development may include sustainable tourism and leisure developments.
5. As the proposed development would be for tourism and leisure purposes, it is supported in principle under Policy 25 subject to it meeting the other specific requirements, and the development plan as a whole. Paragraph 84 of the 2023

National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is supportive of sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.

Accessibility

6. Given the proposed use, the holiday lodges would likely be reached more often than not by private motor vehicle. However, they could also be accessed by bus services. There is a bus stop located close to the new site entrance proposed and one just opposite. These are served by frequent services to Worksop and Doncaster, including evenings and weekends, which give access to a wider range of public transport options to other destinations. A less frequent service runs to Retford. The proposed development would therefore be reasonably well served by public transport.
7. There is a footway between the site and the nearest defined settlement of Bawtry which runs alongside the A638. During my site visit, which I appreciate is just a snapshot in time, I observed a few cyclists and pedestrians using the footway, and so it does provide a means of travel by modes other than the private motor vehicle. Nonetheless, the speed and volume of vehicles on the road and the absence of streetlights would not make for a particularly pleasant walking or cycling environment between the site and Bawtry, especially during darker winter months or in inclement weather. The appellant's Transport Statement shows that there are several Public Rights of Way relatively close to the site although to access these would involve use of the footway along the A638 for at least a short distance.
8. Given this context, the proposal would accord with the requirements of Policy 13 of the Local Plan as the site could be accessed by a range of transport modes. Nevertheless, the development plan must be read as a whole, and accessibility is not the only factor in considering whether the proposal would be a sustainable development in this countryside location. Criterion D of Part 4 of Policy 25 and paragraph 84 of the Framework include consideration of matters relating to the effect of a development on the character and appearance of the area, to which I now turn.

Character and Appearance

9. The in-principle support for tourism and leisure developments in Policy 25 of the Local Plan and paragraph 84 of the Framework is not unqualified. It is subject to development being of an appropriate scale and design so that it does not have a significant adverse impact on the landscape in the case of Policy 25 and respecting the character of the countryside in the case of paragraph 84.
10. The site lies within the Bawtry to Finningley Sands Heaths and Farmland landscape character area as described in the 2007 Doncaster Landscape Character and Capacity Study. Key characteristics are identified as including gently rolling raised ridge of sandstone; medium to large scale intensive arable farmland with rectangular fields; fragmented and missing hedges characteristically lined with bracken; geometric landscape with straight roads, straight edged conifer plantations and fields; large scale coniferous forestry plantations and smaller scattered mixed deciduous and coniferous woodlands.
11. The site comprises a rectangular agricultural field bounded along much of its length by hedgerows with some hedgerow trees. It is set within a gently rolling

landscape of agricultural fields, with blocks of coniferous and mixed woodland apparent. The site and its setting therefore displays some of the key landscape characteristics of the area.

12. There is some development to the south of the site, as described above. The appellant highlights the proximity of Doncaster Airport and the permissions granted for a solar farm to the north and east. Nevertheless, when both approaching and at the site, the sense is one of being in a predominantly open rural landscape.
13. Although the submitted masterplan notes only three bed lodges, plans have been submitted showing one and two bed lodges. The masterplan notes that a typical three bed unit footprint would be 72m² with parking provision for two cars. All sizes of lodge are shown on the submitted plans as single storey black vertical timber clad structures with a mono pitched roof. They would sit on a natural timber decking that would project outwards to the side and front to provide access and a sitting out area. The lodges would therefore be quite substantial structures. Grasscrete or similar would be used for the parking area at each lodge. In addition, there would be a reception building which would include a café and farm shop. This building would be constructed from dark corrugated steel shipping containers with a green roof and vertical larch timber cladding to the front and would include some visitor parking.
14. The appellant contends that a landscape and visual impact assessment was not requested by the Council. Nevertheless, Policy 25 of the Local Plan is clear that consideration is to be given to the impact of development on the landscape and rural character of the area, while paragraph 84 of the Framework is similarly clear about the need to respect the character of the countryside. While a visual impact was submitted as part of the appeal, this just comprises a series of photographs of the site and looking towards it.
15. The hedgerow and trees along the boundary of the site would provide some screening of the proposed development during summer months when they are in full leaf. However, based on what I saw during my site visit, during winter months views of the proposed development would be possible due to the deciduous nature of the hedgerows and trees and occasional gaps. The proposed lodges, reception/café/farm shop building and associated infrastructure would therefore be visible from the proposed access points and the surrounding area for a good proportion of the year.
16. Although the appellant states that there would be no change in land levels, the site slopes gently upwards from the A638 to a high point roughly in the middle of the site. No section drawings have been supplied to demonstrate how the lodges would be accommodated to take account of the sloping land. If any of the units, particularly those closest to the road, were to be raised above ground to account for the gentle slope, this would likely emphasise the visual prominence of the development further. In addition, no information is provided on the height of the proposed bund.
17. Public views of the site would be relatively localised. Nonetheless, the siting of up to 62 lodges, along with the associated domestic paraphernalia, the reception building, hardstanding for the access roads and car parking area, would have an adverse encroaching urbanising effect. Light spillage from internal lighting during hours of darkness and inclement weather would accentuate the prominence and urbanising nature of the development within

the landscape. Given the number of lodges proposed and the extent of the area, the development would appear more substantial than a collection of rural buildings.

18. Although new planting is proposed, it would take a considerable amount of time to establish to make any meaningful contribution to the screening of the development. Even then, given that the lodges would be in place all year around and the proposed planting would consist of deciduous native species, they are likely to be conspicuous in the winter months. In any event, it would not overcome the effect that the proposal would have on the landscape through diminishing the openness of the site and the contribution it makes to the wider rural landscape, which would instead be quite intensely developed with up to 62 lodges and associated infrastructure. Securing a landscape mitigation plan by condition would not be reasonable given my concerns about the impact of the proposal on the character of the area.
19. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposal would result in a significantly harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, it would conflict with Policy 25 of the Local Plan and paragraph 84 of the Framework, as summarised above. It would also conflict with Policy 46 of the Local Plan which is supportive of proposals where they are designed to be sympathetic to local character amongst other matters.

Prosperous Rural Economy

20. The appellant highlights that an objective of Doncaster's tourism strategy is to increase overnight stays to embed Doncaster as a true weekend, conference, and long stay visitor destination. The draft business plan submitted with the appeal sets out a brief market analysis. This includes identifying that the target market would be nature-oriented individuals and families who enjoy outdoor activities. The development would offer pet friendly accommodation which the draft business plan suggests is in short supply in Doncaster hotels. It also states that there is no direct competition nearby offering eco-friendly and competitively priced family holidays. However, no detail is presented on the parameters used in the search.
21. Furthermore, there are conflicting statements from the main parties about whether the Council's business team support the proposal. The Council identify a lack of support from the Business Doncaster Team, but no specific detail is provided other than that the team advised at pre-application stage that existing provision in the area is sufficient. The appellant states that the Tourism team offered support to the proposal, but similarly, no further detail is provided.
22. I appreciate that the surrounding area may have visitor attractions. I acknowledge that it is likely that the proposal would help to support the rural tourist economy through the creation of some direct jobs and increased overnight stays, enabling greater visitor spend locally. However, very limited evidence is presented on direct employment that would be generated by the proposal or how it would specifically contribute to the local economy. As such, based on the evidence before me, I am not persuaded that a case has successfully been made that there would be an overriding benefit to the local economy or community that would provide a locational justification for the proposal in the Countryside Policy Area. I cannot therefore conclude that the

rural location of the enterprise would be justifiable to support a prosperous rural economy as required by criterion A of part 4 of Policy 25.

Conclusion on the Acceptability of the Location

23. I have found that the appeal site is a location that could be accessed by a range of transport modes. There would be harm to the landscape character of the area from the proposed development, meaning that it would not be sympathetic to local character and would not respect the character of the countryside. The provision of holiday lodges has the potential to support the local tourism economy. However, based on the submitted evidence, I am not satisfied that a case has been made that the rural location is justifiable.
24. Overall, therefore, I conclude that the appeal site would be an acceptable location for the proposed development having regard to its accessibility. However, I conclude that it would not be an acceptable location with regard to its effect on the character and appearance of the area, and its location would not be justifiable to support a prosperous rural economy. Accordingly, while there would be no conflict with Policy 13 of the Local Plan, the proposal would conflict with the requirements of Policies 25 and 46 of the Local Plan and paragraph 84 of the Framework, as summarised above.
25. The Council has referred to a conflict with criterion B of part 4 of Policy 25. However, no concerns have been raised by the Council about the effect of the proposal on neighbouring uses or highway safety and I have no reason to take a different view. Nonetheless, this does not alter my conclusions.

Other Matters

26. The evidence before me indicates that the proposal would be capable of achieving a biodiversity net gain. However, any such benefit would not overcome or outweigh the harm identified.
27. The appellant contends that there would be no flood risk or risk to highway safety, and there would be no unacceptable effects on the living conditions of nearby residents. While that may be the case, a lack of harm is effectively neutral in the planning balance.

Conclusion

28. The proposal would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no material considerations that indicate the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

F Wilkinson

INSPECTOR