



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 March 2024

by Jonathan Bore MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 March 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/23/3325979

Battle Farm, Throop, DORCHESTER, DT2 7JD

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Philip Trim against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application reference is P/FUL/2022/03050.
 - The development proposed is the change of use of agricultural buildings to Use Class B8 (storage or distribution).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the scheme on the character and use of the local rural road network.

Reasons

3. The agricultural buildings formerly housed an egg production farm, but they have the potential to accommodate various kinds of agricultural activity, with associated traffic movements. The appellant's transport statement estimates that there were typically 95 daily vehicle movements from the former activity, whereas a transport consultant's report submitted by local residents puts the figure at 32. At one time the grading and packaging of eggs took place on the site, which would point towards the higher figure, with an element of peak hour commuting; but on the other hand most agricultural uses have relatively low staffing levels and do not attract substantial in-commuting. Neither figure can be fully relied on in the absence of direct survey information, but it is a reasonable assumption that the re-use of the site for agriculture would generate vehicle movements somewhere in this range.
4. As regards the potential traffic generation from the appeal scheme, the transport assessment suggests 85 daily movements for commercial warehousing and 154 for warehouse self-storage, based on TRICS data used in a similar planning application. In my assessment the development would have considerable potential to generate traffic at the higher level, since there would be no control over the kind of storage and distribution activity, and for the same reason there is no certainty that the proposed scheme would have a lower level of peak hour flow than the former egg production unit. Moreover, the characteristics of the site itself support the conclusion that the scheme has the potential to generate considerably higher levels of flow than the agricultural use. The six substantial modern buildings, totalling over 5,000 square metres of floorspace, would be capable of housing a wide range and significant amount

of B8 storage and distribution activity, with the potential for a great deal of associated movement, including heavy vehicles, vans of various sizes and cars. For all these reasons, there is a strong probability that traffic generation from the proposed use would be considerably in excess of that of the past operation and of other forms of agricultural re-occupation.

5. The site is in a rural location and is accessed very largely by single track lanes. It is proposed to direct traffic to turn right, southwards, out of the site to avoid the villages of Throop and Briantspuddle, but this would not prevent satellite navigation systems from directing incoming vehicles to the site through the villages. The lanes through the villages are narrow and winding and have no footways. The probability is that the increase in traffic would be at a level which would harm the quality of the environment in the villages.
6. The recommended route southwards would travel up the narrow and winding Throop Hollow to Throop Clump. At that point, a left turn towards Bere Regis and the A31 and A35 east would involve passing towards the river valley, over a narrow bridge and along Yearlings Drove, a tight single-track road with a number of bends, poor visibility and embanked sides in places, with a few small, informal passing bays and much evidence of verge erosion. An alternative route towards the A35 would involve a right turn at Throop Clump to follow the lane towards the B3390. This road, which joins Hardy Way near Culpepper's Dish, is a straight, narrow and attractive lane with grass verges. It connects with a number of bridleways and gives access to a picnic and parking area at Culpepper's Dish.
7. It is acknowledged that the County Highway Authority has not objected to the scheme. But these beautiful rural lanes are quiet and have recreational value for residents and visitors; they are used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Meeting oncoming commercial traffic, even small vans, would be challenging and even intimidating for other road users. In most cases it would be impossible for two vehicles to pass without encroaching on the verges or backing to the nearest passing place. Where the lanes are bounded by banks, visibility is limited, and it would be difficult for non-vehicular users of the lanes to find refuge. Lanes that currently retain their rural character, including unspoiled banks and attractive grass verges, would be susceptible to verge erosion and the additional vehicles associated with the proposed use would undermine their tranquillity and value for recreational use.

Conclusion

8. The proposed development would significantly erode the rural character and beauty of these lanes and undermine their recreational use by making them feel less tranquil, less convenient and less safe. The Council's suggested conditions, including the control of operating hours, the prevention of external storage, the provision of a passing place, and the implementation of the measures in the appellant's submitted transport statement, would not overcome these fundamental objections. Whilst the scheme would involve the re-use of rural buildings, its size would not amount to a small-scale rural employment use as encouraged by Policy E of the adopted Purbeck Local Plan. It would have a significant adverse impact on the rural environment and traffic movements, contrary to Policy CO of the Local Plan, and would conflict with Policies LD, E and IAT which seek to direct employment development to the most sustainable locations.

9. I have considered all the other matters raised, but they do not alter the balance of my conclusions. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Jonathan Bore

INSPECTOR