



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 April 2024

by J Hills MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 April 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/U1105/W/23/3334199

Oaklands Field to the north of Sidmouth Road, Aylesbeare

- 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 M Glanvill of Glanvill Partners Ltd against the decision of East Devon District Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/0556/FUL.
 - The development proposed is change of use of land from agricultural use to storage (within Use Class B8) for the siting of up to 40 storage containers.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was revised on 19 December 2023 and is a material consideration in planning decisions. Having regard to the matters that are most relevant to this appeal, there have been few substantive changes albeit that the numbering of paragraphs has changed. Hence, I am satisfied that no one will be prejudiced by the changes to the national policy context.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the site is a suitable location for the development having regard to the provisions of local and national policy.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises part of a wider, expansive agricultural field in an undesignated countryside location. Despite the presence of a garage and campsite in the wider area, it is isolated from any settlement. It is next to a large agricultural building with a water and electricity supply. Along with a network of fields surrounding it, the site forms part of an area characterised by its gently undulating landscape, punctuated by attractive tree and hedge boundaries. The appeal site and building are eminently visible from the nearby connecting trunk road.
5. Strategy 7 of the East Devon Local Plan, adopted January 2016 (LP) only supports development in the countryside where it would accord with other policies that permit such development, and where it would not harm distinctive landscape qualities. Other relevant policies are E4 and E5 which deal with rural diversification and small scale economic development in rural areas respectively.

6. Policy E4 of the LP is supportive of proposals that diversify and expand on the range of traditional economic activities in rural areas. A list of the types of expanded uses is set out within the supporting text. This includes the keeping of non-traditional livestock, alternative crop production; and recreation and tourism uses such as pony trekking, fishing and holiday accommodation. Although this list is not exhaustive, self-storage would not fall neatly into these types of uses.
7. Amongst other things, the policy explains that proposals must be complementary to or compatible with the agricultural operations in the rural area, or farm. They must be operated as part of the overall holding. Additionally, proposals must be compatible within the landscape setting.
8. The overall business is predominantly agricultural and covers a large area. An existing self-storage facility within the holding has been successfully operational, growing organically over a number of years. It is claimed to be crucial to the survival of the business and is about 4 miles from the appeal site. I have been provided with no reason why this could not continue. Whilst the pressures on the farming industry have been broadly explained, there is little evidence that the existing business would be put at risk if the development were not to proceed.
9. The development would be centrally located within the overall holding. It would be positioned next to a farm building and the well-connected road network. However, although the facility could be safely managed and maintained by the farm team, very little substantive information has been provided in respect of the site's locational credentials, such as catchment areas and local demand. Furthermore, it is not clear why the existing facility, which is said not to be in full use/occupation, would be unsafe or unsuitable. Moreover, it is not shown how a small expansion of the sizeable existing facility would put pressure on the main holding, for example.
10. Customers could access the storage containers without compromising the functionality of the farm. Whilst noting their indirect economic benefits, these would be likely to be modest and not linked to the existing farm business. Accordingly, for the reasons given, the development would not be representative of a countryside use complementary or compatible with the agricultural uses at this location as Policy E4 of the LP intends.
11. In respect of landscape setting, although the proposal may be defined as small-scale, it would still cover a significantly large area of ground in relation to the building next to it. It would be spread out across this wide area which would add to the overall presence of development in the landscape.
12. Biodiversity enhancements and efforts to mitigate the visual effects, including green, single stacked containers and landscaping along the western and northern boundaries are acknowledged. However, even with appropriately worded conditions, the scheme would still be visibly prominent.
13. In that respect, the agricultural building next to the appeal site is large. However, it is typical of the rural landscape. Although the storage containers would be positioned close by, they would be unusual features within the countryside. Consequently, the eye would be drawn to them. For the above reasons, the character, scale and location of the development would not be compatible with its landscape setting. This conflicts with Policy E4 of the LP. In

these circumstances, despite the proximity of a bus stop and a safe and suitable access, there would be no support for the small-scale economic development set out in Policy E5 of the LP.

14. Drawing these matters together, there would be harm to the character and appearance of the area. While the appellant goes some way towards justifying their position, the evidence provided in support of the appeal is not sufficiently robust to demonstrate the economic benefits would outweigh the identified harm. The environmental harm means that the proposal would not represent a sustainable type of business in a rural area as supported within the Framework.
15. Therefore, I conclude that the site is not a suitable location for the development having regard to the provisions of local and national policy. As such, it would conflict with Strategy 7 and policies E4 and E5 of the LP.

Other Matters

16. I have paid regard to comments in respect of the processing of the application. However, these have no bearing on my decision which is based on the planning merits of the proposal.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons above, and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the proposed development would fail to accord with the development plan as a whole and there are no considerations individually or cumulatively that outweigh this. Therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

J Hills

INSPECTOR