



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 June 2024

by L N Hughes BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 July 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/W/23/3334373

Buckley Hall Farm, Preston Road, Ribchester, Lancashire PR3 3YD

- 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 John Cosgrove against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 3/2023/0498.
 - The development proposed is erection of agricultural building and surrounding hard-standing, with solar panels to south facing roof area.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') was revised in December 2023, postdating the submission of this appeal. The Framework content was not materially altered in respect of the main issues before me, and the parties have had a chance to comment on any implications.
3. A small wooden building has been erected in the field adjacent to the site, which is not identified in the written evidence or on the plans. However, it has not had a determinative bearing on my consideration of the main issues. It has therefore not been necessary to go back to the main parties for comment.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposed development is needed for the purposes of agriculture; and
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the countryside.

Reasons

Suitable Location

5. The site lies to the south-west of the dwellinghouse of Buckley Hall Farm (BHF), within a large field accessed off a track from Preston Road. The farmholding comprises this field and another landholding in Bleasdale 9 miles away, as well as the curtilage around the dwellinghouse. The dwellinghouse of Old Buckley Hall lies to the north-east of the BHF dwelling, and is a Grade II listed building. The proposal is for a large single-storey pitched-roof agricultural building with hardstanding.

6. The development strategy within the 'Core Strategy 2008 – 2028 A Local Plan for Ribbles Valley' (LP) (2014) identifies the site as within the countryside. The parties agree that in order to comply with the relevant LP Policy DMG2(2), the building must be demonstrated to be needed for the purposes of agriculture.
7. The appellant has a combined agricultural landholding of 13 hectares across both BHF and Bleasdale, with no building from which to service it. They relatively recently took over these two parcels of land, which were previously under 2 separate ownerships and serviced from agricultural buildings located elsewhere on those farmers' holdings. They have 70 sheep, with land at Bleasdale used for rough pasture, and BHF used for hay production.
8. The appellant has identified a relatively extensive list of required machinery and equipment for the upkeep of the land and their farming activities. This needs secure and covered storage, and some requires high overhead clearance. I have no reason to believe that this equipment is not required, and I find it reasonable that some is not yet in their ownership, due to the risk of damage or theft for unsecure equipment.
9. The building would also be used for hay bale storage from the 4 hectares of Grade 3 land at BHF. This would be more environmentally friendly than single-use plastic required for outside storage. The Council is unconvinced of the possibility of the suggested 60-100 large hay bale crop per year. However, the appellant identifies this as being an average from one cut per year, and so a minimum of what may be achieved as BHF has historically produced 120-200 large bales in some years. They identify the John Nix Pocketbook for Farm Management as a widely recognised information source, which is based on a presumption of 2 cuts per year for hay. I therefore find 2 or 3 crops per year to be possible at BHF, with associated internal storage thus being necessary.
10. The building would also be used for multiple instances of sheep welfare, identified by the appellant as necessary as set out in the 'Sheep Welfare Document' based on DEFRA guidance. While shelter needs would only be short-term, such as during lambing, these guidelines suggest to me that some form of shelter is nonetheless required across different times of the year. The evidence presented does not suggest minimum shelter size guidelines.
11. Overall, I therefore accept as a matter of principle that the size of the landholding and the activities undertaken on it justifies an agricultural building. It is required to store equipment and hay bales, and for sheep welfare. While it may be that a smaller building could also achieve these purposes, I have very limited information before me to determine what lower scale of building would still support this need. I also accept the benefit of some flexibility in this regard, with uncertainty being inherent to various farming practices such as the impact of weather patterns, and to allow for movement of equipment and bales within the building. The proposed building's open plan layout would provide the most seasonable flexibility across all of its uses.
12. As such, I am persuaded that the size of building proposed is needed for the purposes of agriculture. It would therefore comply with the LP Policy DMG2 criterion (2) as outlined above. However, Policy DMG further requires that development is also required to be in keeping with the character of the landscape, and to acknowledge the special qualities of the area by virtue of its size, design, use of materials, landscaping, and siting. I therefore address this aspect of the Policy below.

Character and Appearance

13. The area has a clearly rural and open character, with large fields interspersed with boundary vegetation, plus scattered clusters of buildings within individual farmsteads. The proposed building would have stone to the lower part of the northern elevation, and Yorkshire boards to the remaining elevations, with a roof of metal profiled sheeting incorporating roof-lights and solar panels. There would be a personnel door, plus galvanised steel roller shutter doors in the northern and southern elevations.
14. I find that in isolation, the building's appearance would be acceptable. Its form and materiality would be clearly agricultural, and the natural finish of the Yorkshire boards would be sympathetic to the local townscape character and landscape. The roller shutter doors would be viewed in this broader context, and so would not assert an unduly industrial overall character. This is especially as such doors are necessary and commonplace, and indeed are incorporated within various nearby agricultural buildings.
15. Old Buckley Hall is a grade II listed building under separate ownership. I have a statutory duty under Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of the listed buildings. Section 16 of the Framework also requires that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. The LP Policies EN5 and DME4 broadly align with this approach, identifying that proposals which cause harm to the significance of heritage assets will not be supported.
16. The significance of Old Buckley Hall is as a surviving cross wing of a substantial C17th house. It is a 2 storey dwelling of sandstone rubble with a stone slate roof, and the fenestration presents traditional architectural detailing. The appeal site contributes to its setting as part of the wider rural open character of the area. However, the proposed building would be blocked from being within the Old Buckley Hall sightline, due to the BHF dwelling and large outbuilding, domestic curtilage, and access track all in between. All views of the listed building also include the BHF dwelling.
17. The addition of the agricultural building would therefore have a neutral impact on the physical significance and the historical understanding of Old Buckley Hall and its setting. It would thus comply with the Framework section 16 and the LP Policies EN5 and DME4 regarding the preservation of heritage assets.
18. Clustering new built form with existing buildings has some general visual merit in reducing impact on the openness of the rural character. However, this would also result in an awkward relationship with the BHF dwelling. The significant size and bulky massing of the agricultural building, despite its lower height, would unduly compete with the existing prominence and architectural interest of the farmhouse. This would result in a visually inappropriate and unsympathetic development.
19. Furthermore, despite the general proximity to the dwelling, the building would be set out into a large and very open field. This juxtaposition would be clearly visible by users of the adjacent Public Right of Way, and from limited hedgerow gaps when travelling along Preston Road, despite the topography and intervening hedgerows. Incorporating additional landscaping would not overcome this. It would appear more dominant than the existing farmhouse in

many views, and so would have an adverse impact on the area's existing open and rural character.

20. Overall, I therefore find that the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the countryside. It would conflict with the LP Policies DMG1 and DME2, and part of DMG2. Together and amongst other matters, these require development to be sympathetic to existing land uses in terms of the relationship between buildings and the impact on landscape character, including by virtue of its size, design, and siting.

Other Matters

21. I have identified above the reasons why the proposal is needed for agriculture, with relation to the benefits which it would provide to the appellant's farming enterprise. I give these benefits significant weight. There would also be associated small-scale but wider economic benefits from improved farming practices, as well as very limited economic benefits from construction, both of which I give limited weight. The roof solar panels and the removal of single-use plastics for hay bales would be a small-scale environmental benefit to which I give limited weight.
22. I find it only a tenuous justification that the precise siting is required in order to protect existing utilities. Some utilities are shown on one of the plans, but how they have precluded other locations within the wider field is not clearly identified. While an alternative orientation and location may be more visible from the road or in other views, as I have found that the building's appearance is acceptable in isolation, this would not necessarily cause harm. There is a general lack of evidence for discounted options.
23. I acknowledge that dismissing this proposal may harmfully impact on sheep welfare. However, I also find it likely that a smaller sheep shelter could be erected on the farmholding, such that there is no urgent overriding need relating to animal welfare.
24. I note the lack of consultee or interested party objections, but this does not indicate a lack of harm.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

25. The weight I give to the need for the proposal, and its benefits, is relatively finely balanced against the weight to which I give to the harm to the character and appearance of the countryside, and the conflict with the development plan. However, I also give moderate weight as a material consideration to the possibility that an alternate siting of the agricultural building within the field would cause less harm.
26. Overall therefore, the proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole. With no other material considerations outweighing this conflict, for the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

L N Hughes

INSPECTOR