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# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 July 2024

**by F Harrison BA(Hons) MA MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 19 July 2024**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/24/3338945**

**Land at Wintrick Farm, Felton Morpeth**

- 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 Dr Frances Allan against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
  - The application Ref is 23/02325/FUL.
  - The development proposed is erection of a single new self-build holiday let including hardstanding and landscaping.
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## Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

## Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposal constitutes an acceptable form of development outside the development limits.

## Reasons

3. The appeal site accommodates an area of hardstanding and vegetation and forms part of a traditional farmstead, now in residential use. It is suggested that the appeal site and surrounding development meets the typical criteria for a hamlet, however the Council do not recognise Wintrick Farm as a hamlet. Even if there is a long history of built development in the locality, in my view, the cluster of buildings, in visual, functional and physical terms, are not sufficiently grouped to be regarded as a hamlet. As such, the appeal site is located within the open countryside.
4. Part 2 d) of Policy ECN15 of the Northumberland Local Plan (2022) (NLP) sets out the circumstances under which tourism and visitor development in the open countryside may be acceptable. The proposed development would be small-scale and managed by the appellant who lives adjacent to the site. It is not disputed that it would meet criterion ii of Part 2 d) of Policy ECN15, being located as close as is practicable to existing development. However, new permanent buildings for visitor accommodation will only be supported where they demonstrably improve and diversify the County's tourist offer and/or clearly provide necessary accommodation along an established tourist route.
5. It is not disputed that tourism is an important part of the local economy, and Northumberland has a wide range of types of visitor accommodation. Furthermore, the strategy for the visitor economy set out in the NLP and Thirston Neighbourhood Development Plan 2020 – 2036 (2021) (TNDP) seeks to diversify the range of accommodation available.

6. Nevertheless, even if there is demand for modern, family sized accommodation to complement existing provision, and although the appeal site is not in a location that is oversaturated by visitor accommodation, there is no substantive evidence to differentiate the appeal scheme from the types of accommodation already being provided for. Consequently, it has not been shown that the proposal would demonstrably improve and diversify the range of accommodation offered to tourists, as required by Policy ECN15.
7. The supporting text to Policy ECN15 sets out that small scale permanent accommodation may be needed to serve the County's long-distance walking and cycling routes, including Hadrian's Wall Path and the Reivers' Way, providing an indication of what is understood as an established tourist route. The Council's officer report also refers to long-distance routes, explaining that these routes have been found to be short of opportunities to 'bunk down' or camp overnight.
8. The appellant contends that the site is located along several tourist routes and is within a tourism corridor. However, even if I were to accept that the A1, St Oswald's Way and nearby public rights of ways were established tourist routes in the context of Policy ECN15, it has not been clearly articulated that the proposal would provide necessary accommodation, which the Council have indicated is for short overnight stays. It is my view that the large, detached property would realistically be more attractive for longer stays. The proposal does not therefore meet the overarching aims and intent of Policy ECN15.
9. The supporting text also sets out that new buildings in the open countryside for visitor accommodation will be supported, on occasion, in accessible locations and the spatial strategy set out in Policy STP1 of the NLP is clear that development in the open countryside must demonstrate that it supports sustainable rural tourism. Furthermore, Policy 7 of the TNDP seeks low impact tourism accommodation. There are a range of tourist attractions within the wider area and the occupants would have access to the appellant's bikes and horses. However, the roads in the surrounding area do not benefit from footpaths, have no streetlights and any grass verges adjacent to the roads are generally of a narrow width.
10. Irrespective of the amount of leisure time visitors may have, the roads would not be a particularly attractive route to take, particularly in the evenings. In combination with the distance to the nearest bus stop and settlement, visitors would be deterred from walking and cycling and would be reliant on the use of the private car. While the appellant would be available to transport the visitors, the proposed development would nonetheless be reliant on the private car.
11. Policy 7 of the TNDP supports the provision of temporary tourism accommodation in the form of bunkhouses, chalets, touring caravans and camping accommodation. Notwithstanding that these forms of accommodation are not precisely defined, the proposed detached dwelling would not reasonably fall within what is understood to be these types of accommodation. Neither does the policy explicitly support small scale permanent holiday lets such as the appeal scheme. Consequently, the proposal does not attract policy support from Policy 7.
12. There were no objections from statutory consultees, and while it may be that a similar scheme has recently been granted permission I have been presented with limited details. In any event, I have considered this proposal on its own

merits and the fact that apparently similar development has been granted permission elsewhere, and the absence of any objections, are not reasons in themselves to allow unacceptable development.

13. To conclude, the proposal would not constitute an acceptable form of development outside the development limits, in conflict with Policy ECN15 of the NLP and Policy 7 of the TNDP. Amongst other things, these policies require development in the countryside to demonstrably improve and diversify the tourist offer, and/or provide necessary accommodation along such a tourist route and be low impact accommodation in the form of bunkhouses, chalets, touring caravans and camping accommodation.

### **Other Matters**

14. The proposal would bring some benefits to the local tourism economy, however, given the scale, the contribution would be limited. It would be accommodated within the existing area of hardstanding and it is not disputed that the scheme would deliver good design and that new and existing soft landscaping would provide some screening. It would also provide appropriate car parking and deliver carbon reductions. The lack of harm on these matters and any other policy compliance would be a neutral factor, weighing neither for nor against the proposal.
15. Although the scheme would be self-build, Policy HOU5 of the NLP relates to meeting local housing needs and new residential housing, and my attention has not been drawn to any words in the policy that are relevant to the above main issue. It has not therefore been determinative in my decision.

### **Conclusion**

16. My above findings bring the proposal into conflict with the development plan, read as a whole. There are no material considerations that indicate that I should take a decision otherwise than in accordance with it. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

*F Harrison*

INSPECTOR