



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 October 2024

by C Rose BA (Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17th October 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/M1710/W/23/3331309

Sandhill Farm, Picketts Hill, Headley, Bordon, Hampshire GU35 8TF

- 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 James Hewitt, Knightsbridge Farms Limited against the decision of East Hampshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 27877/026.
 - The development proposed is Extension of existing agricultural building to include roof solar and engineering works on land for ground source heat facilities.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for Extension of existing agricultural building to include roof solar and engineering works on land for ground source heat facilities at Sandhill Farm, Picketts Hill, Headley, Bordon, Hampshire GU35 8TF in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 27877/026, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with drawing nos: Plan KCC2232/22 Location Plan, Promap – Location Plan, Promap - External Works Location; EX01 Rev: A Location and Block plan; 2017.14-GF-100c Existing Building with Proposed Outline Plan & Elevations for the New Extension; General Arrangement and 2017.14-GF-101c Final Revision 30/11/2022 Proposed Plan of New Extension Building located beside the existing Unit 1.
 - 3) The building hereby approved shall only be used for the purposes of storing and accommodating on-site renewable energy equipment/infrastructure and if at any time the building ceases to be used or required for such purpose it shall be removed and the site re-instated to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.
 - 4) The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the Mitigation recommendations and Enhancements detailed in Sections 14 and 15 of the submitted Extended Phase 1 Ecological Assessment (dated January 2023) by Phillips Ecology. The Enhancements shall be implemented prior to first use of the building.

Preliminary Matter

2. Following the decision of the Council on the planning application, a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 19 December 2023. Whilst paragraph number 174 in previous versions of the

Framework referred to by the Council is now paragraph number 180, any policies that are material to this decision have not fundamentally changed. I am satisfied that this has not prejudiced any party and I have had regard to the latest version in reaching my decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for the proposed development with regard to the local development strategy including the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located within the countryside. The site comprises a number of buildings including a farmhouse, farm office, B1/B8 starter units, B1/B8 commercial unit and a barn benefitting from prior approval to three dwellings. The appeal site also comprises an adjoining field where the ground source heat facilities (GSHF) would be located. Planning permission has recently been granted for the use of part of this field for dog exercising.
5. There is a further barn at the site that the proposed building would be attached to. The Council advise that there was no evidence submitted with the planning application demonstrating that this barn was in agricultural use. Nonetheless, as detailed in the appellant's appeal evidence, and as I witnessed at my site visit, this barn is being used for the storage of hay, storage of farm vehicles and machinery and is being used for the breeding and rearing of small livestock in a separate internal enclosure.
6. While the barn is also being used for the storage of some general household goods, this occupies a relatively small area. I also note the intension to diversify and use part of this barn for an enterprise involving crickets and flies.
7. In light of the above, I am satisfied that the barn is in agricultural use. Given that the agricultural use occupies a significant part of the building, with more space required for the diversification, there would not be adequate space remaining to house the equipment related to the solar panels and GSHF as illustrated on the Pictorial Illustration accompanying the appeal¹.
8. Although I acknowledge that the agricultural holding is relatively limited in scope and size, with dog exercising granted on part of the adjoining field, there are no other large agricultural buildings available to provide covered storage to serve the field and wider management of the land. As such it is reasonable for the appellant to want to retain the barn in agricultural use.
9. Policy CP19 of The East Hampshire District Local Plan: Joint Core Strategy (LP) relates to development in the countryside. It states that the approach is to operate a policy of general restraint in order to protect the countryside for its own sake. As a result, the only development allowed in the countryside will be that with a genuine and proven need for a countryside location, such as that necessary for farming and rural enterprise.
10. The appeal proposal would make the wider site more energy efficient seeking to produce all of its energy needs on site. The proposal would therefore serve Barn 3 as well as the other buildings and uses on the site. In this regard the

¹ Appendix 10 - Outline Internal Energy Barn

proposal complies with LP Policy CP24 in terms of supporting the provision of on-site renewable energy and would comprise a reasonable extension of an existing business in the countryside in accordance with LP Policy CP6.

11. Furthermore, as the energy is proposed to be produced on site to serve the existing buildings and uses, it cannot reasonably be located elsewhere and as such there is a genuine and proven need for its location in the countryside to serve the farming use of the site and the wider enterprise in this rural location.
12. With regard to the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, the proposed building would be located off Picketts Hill and would be generally enclosed by significant tree planting to its eastern, southern and western boundaries such that it would not be highly visible. From Picketts Hill, the building would be predominately screened by existing boundary fencing and planting. Where visible, the new building would be viewed against the existing barns and would be of similar materials and appearance. While there would be earthworks necessary for the installation of the GSHF, the field would be re-instated following the works. The proposal would therefore comply with LP Policy CP29 by respecting the character of this part of the countryside.
13. I conclude that the appeal site is an appropriate location for the proposed development with regard to the local development strategy including the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area. As such, it accords with LP Policy CP19, the aims of which I have outlined above. In this regard, the proposal would also comply with paragraph 180 of the Framework in terms of recognising the intrinsic character of the countryside.

Other Matters

14. I note the comments from Headley Parish Council regarding the plans, but I am satisfied that they show ample detail of the panels, battery storage and GSHF.

Conditions

15. I have considered the conditions suggested by the Council against the advice in the Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance on the use of planning conditions. In addition to the standard time condition, a condition specifying the relevant plans is necessary for reasons of certainty.
16. A condition is necessary to restrict the use of the building to that being applied for due to the location of the site where a policy of general restraint operates in order to protect the countryside for its own sake and where only development with a genuine and proven need for a countryside location is allowed.
17. A condition is necessary to provide the ecological mitigation recommendations and enhancements in the interests of biodiversity. I have amended the wording of the condition for reasons of certainty.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons given above the appeal should be allowed.

C Rose

INSPECTOR