



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 November 2024

by David Murray BA (Hons) DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/F1610/W/24/3343797

Edge of woodland, North of Empshill Farm, Farmington, Gloucestershire, GL54 3ND

- 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 and Mrs B Tew against the decision of Cotswold District Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/03838/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the siting of two (caravan act compliant) log cabins to provide tourist accommodation in support of farm diversification.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal accords with the tourism accommodation strategy in Local Plan Policy EC11.
 - whether the log cabins would conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswold National Landscape.

Reasons

Background

3. The appeal site comprises part of an area of woodland which lies to the north of farm buildings at Empshill Farm. This occupies a relatively isolated position in the Cotswold landscape, which is recognised as a National Landscape ((NL) (previously Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). It is proposed to site two log cabins on the edge of the woodland and form an access with two parking spaces for each cabin. A related proposal would involve the placing of 84 PV panels on the east facing roof of an existing farm building to the south of the main site.

Accord with tourism strategy in Policy EC11

4. The reasoned justification to Local Plan Policy EC11 sets out the background to local tourism and indicates that self-catering accommodation can make a valuable contribution to the rural economy. Nevertheless, the general stance in the countryside and areas of high environmental quality places an emphasis on the conversion of existing buildings rather than new build.

5. The proposal is for two 'glamping' units which the agent says means 'glamorous camping' and as such the proposal should be considered as compliant with part 7 of the Policy EC1 which relates to the expansion of existing or new touring caravan and camping sites. However this part of the policy is subject to two criteria where (a) says a site should be well related to main tourist routes and (b) encourages the re-use of converted or convertible buildings and that new building should be kept to a minimum.
6. Dealing with these criteria, in this case it has not been shown that the appeal site is well related to a main tourist route. Its location appears remote from such routes, settlements and visitor attractions. Neither does the proposal make use of an existing building.
7. It is also questionable whether the proposal involves a 'camping or caravanning use' within the terms of part 7 of the policy which relates to touring caravan and camping sites. I recognise that the log cabins would fall within the definition of a caravan as twin mounted units not exceeding 20m in length. However, while they would be transient in theory, there is likely to be a significant degree of permanence associated with the cabins given that each is shown to have an area of decking on two sides and incorporating a hot tub. Moreover each unit is also shown to have water and electrical supply together with foul sewerage disposed of to an on-site package treatment plant. Taking account of the decision in *Werham*, considered in the round I find that these facilities increase the perception of permanence rather than temporary facilities related to sites for people touring.
8. The nature of the accommodation within the units, with each having a kitchen, dining area and living space together with two bedrooms each with an en-suite, suggests to me that the proposal should be regarded as self-catering accommodation to which part 3 of Policy EC11 applies. Nevertheless the presumption here is for the need to be met through the re-use of an existing building. In respect of part 4, as an exception, this does apply to new build, short stay, self-catering units but these have to be directly associated on-site with a tourist attraction and be required to sustain the viability of that attraction. There is no clear evidence that the proposal would meet this form of exception.
9. It may be that the term 'glamping' does not fit easily in the terms of the policy EC11 but the general stance within this is that within locations of high environmental quality, which must include the Cotswold National Landscape, the presumption is for tourist accommodation to be located within settlements or make use of existing building in the countryside. Although the cabins are technically caravans, their use and appearance and degree of permanence is akin to new build development.
10. I have taken account of the other cases which the appellant raises and says that the Council are being inconsistent and unfair in their approach to 'glamping'. However the permission mentioned at Tetbury appears to involve a mixture of tents and shepherds' huts which are more likely to be transient in nature. The case at Mangersbury is said in the accompanying officer report to involve a structure which has been at the site for some 35 years and the wagon is also said to have had a degree of mobility. Finally there is little context given with the copy of a permission for a caravan site and tourist accommodation at

Great Farm Whelford. I am therefore not able to place much weight on these decisions in support of the appeal scheme.

11. Overall on this issue I find that the proposal conflicts with the strategy for tourist accommodation set out in Policy EC11.

Effect on the Cotswold landscape

12. The Council's statement refers to the landscape character of the area as set out in the Cotswold Landscape Character Assessment. Together with the woodland in which the cabins are proposed the area around the appeal site includes pasture farmland with a strong pattern of hedgerows. There are extensive views of a wide expanse of open fields especially to the east of the site. I also noted that extensive replanting has been carried out around the site possibly to replace some of the existing trees which seem to have ash die-back.
13. In considering this issue I have taken account of the Landscape and Visual Impact Statement prepared by Landscape Matters. This concludes that the tree felling within the site is necessary because of dead spruce trees and ash die-back. However, this will be compensated by the planting of some 300 trees and shrubs and this work has already started. The assessment finds that the cabins would be discretely set within a hedge bound woodland area with access off an existing track. As such the landscape impact is said to be very small negative in the short-term improving post 'construction' to a very small positive impact when the new planting is taken into account.
14. This reflects my own perception of the site where I found that the existing boundary hedges would partly screen the cabins from being seen in long distance views and these would be further limited by the additional planning currently being undertaken.
15. I find that the log cabins would have a local and limited visual impact on the landscape character of the Cotswolds and would not have significant detrimental impact on the natural landscape which is the test set out in Local Plan Policy EN4.

Planning balance

16. On the main issues I have found that the proposal conflicts with the strategy for tourist accommodation set out in Policy EC11 as the log cabins, although meeting the definition of caravans, will have a form and degree of permanence akin to new physical development on this isolated site, rather than re-use an existing building. The proposal has been shown to have only a local and limited visual impact in the landscape because of present and proposed tree hedge planting, nevertheless it would involve new structures and activity in a remote part of the NL. Great weight has to be given to conserving and enhancing the scenic beauty of the NL in the long term. Overall, I find that the proposal does not accord with the relevant policies in the development plan when its provisions are read as a whole.
17. This has to be balanced with other considerations. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) generally supports proposals for a prosperous rural economy and guidance in paragraph 88 supports agricultural diversification and the development of rural based businesses, together with sustainable rural tourism which respects the character of the countryside. I have also taken account of the other aspects of social, economic and

environmental benefits set out in the appellant's case which are said to align with the Framework. However these benefits are general and unquantified in nature and do not provide a clear justification to outweigh my conclusions on the conflict with development plan policy.

18. Overall I find that while the visual impact of the proposal would be local and limited, it would involve a form of tourist accommodation which would not conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds in the long term.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

David Murray

INSPECTOR