



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on [Event Date]

by A Wright BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 31 December 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Q1153/W/24/3346095

Rosemary Cottage, Road from Thorndon Cross to Cowsen Cross, Thorndon Cross, Devon EX20 4NF

- 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 Hodges against the decision of West Devon Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 1442/23/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as "change of use of land for a mixed use including creation of a pond, landscaping and principally camping and erection of buildings and associated development".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. A camping pod and field shelter are already located on the site. For the avoidance of doubt, I have determined the appeal based on the submitted plans.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - whether the site would be a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to the accessibility of services and facilities and the provisions of the development plan; and
 - the effect of the proposal on landscape character.

Reasons

Suitability of the location

4. Policy TTV1 of the Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan 2019 (JLP) sets out a hierarchy of settlements for the distribution of development in the plan area. The appeal site is in the countryside where development will only be permitted if it meets the sustainable development principles set out in Policies SPT1 and SPT2 and the provisions for development in the countryside outlined in Policy TTV26, amongst other things.
5. Policies SPT1, SPT2, DEV29 and TTV2 of the JLP require developments to have access to services and non-car transport modes, with those in this area having

access to sustainable transport that is appropriate to the context. In addition, Policy DEV32 seeks to deliver low carbon development.

6. JLP Policy TTV26 seeks to avoid isolated development in the countryside and only permits development in exceptional circumstances. The proposal is for a campsite with associated buildings and landscaping. Whilst the appellant indicates that it would complement the existing use, the appeal scheme would not meet an essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work or any other exceptions listed in the policy.
7. Policy DEV15 of the JLP supports proposals in suitable locations which seek to diversify the rural economy. This includes camping facilities that respond to an identified local need and have no adverse environmental impact, amongst other things. It requires such proposals to avoid significantly increasing the number of trips by private car and to facilitate the use of sustainable transport, including walking and cycling, where appropriate. It also seeks to avoid incongruous or isolated new buildings.
8. The appeal site is in an isolated rural location, accessed from a country lane linking to the A3079 at Thorndon Cross, where there are bus stops. Thorndon Cross has limited facilities and the nearest settlements with services for tourists are at Bridestowe around 3.5km away and Okehampton around 6km from the site.
9. There are several buses operating at 2-3 hour intervals during the day, providing connections from Thorndon Cross to Okehampton and Bude, but these do not run later in the evenings or on Sundays or Bank Holidays. Access from the site to the bus stops around 400m away is via an unlit lane with no footpaths. Therefore, whilst use of buses would be an option for some trips by some people, the nature of the route between the site and the bus stops, together with the relatively infrequent bus services, would limit its attractiveness, particularly at times of darkness and bad weather.
10. I note the intention to shuttle visitors to the site from Okehampton railway station and the bus stops. Nonetheless, due to its location, future users of the proposed facility would be likely to be reliant on private vehicles to access the site and services.
11. The appellant states that the scheme would provide pitches for up to ten tents on non-electric pitches which would not result in unacceptable levels of additional traffic on quiet rural roads or a materially significant increase in traffic using the A3079. Further, West Devon is a tourist destination with a range of widely dispersed visitor attractions most readily accessed by private vehicle. Notwithstanding this, due to its location some distance from facilities and with limited access to public transport, the proposed use would conflict with the Council's strategy of focussing development, including camping facilities, in areas which facilitate the use of non-car transport modes.
12. It is indicated that self-sufficient living and agroforestry workshops would be offered, and the pitches would be for those who are not members of the Camping and Caravanning Club, providing a different offer to nearby member only sites. In addition to the educational benefits, I acknowledge that the appeal scheme would contribute to the local economy. Nevertheless, there is limited evidence of an identified local need for the proposed facility in this location as required by Policy DEV15.

13. The appellant refers to the contrast between the appeal proposal and the spa and golf complexes immediately east of Thorndon Cross. However, I have limited information on the planning permissions for the complexes and the Council's rationale for approving them, so comparisons between them and the proposed scheme cannot be made.
14. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would not be a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to the accessibility of services and facilities and the provisions of the development plan. This would conflict with Policies SPT1, SPT2, TTV1, TTV2, TTV26, DEV15, DEV29 and DEV32 of the JLP. Together, these require developments to have access to services and sustainable transport modes, seek to avoid isolated development in the countryside, and require camping facilities to respond to an identified local need, amongst other things.

Landscape character

15. The appeal site lies adjacent to Rosemary Cottage, comprising a sloping field and land beside the access to the dwelling. It is largely enclosed by planting, but there are gaps in the roadside hedge for the vehicular access in the north and a field access in the south. There is some development clustered around Thorndon Cross, but around the site, development is more sporadic and set amongst fields within a rolling landscape.
16. The site is within the River Valley Slopes and Combes landscape character type in the Landscape Character Assessment for South Hams and West Devon 2018. The key characteristics of this area include rounded hills and steep undulating slopes overlooking narrow river valleys, with much of the land used as pasture with fields separated by species rich hedges. The area is also noted for its strong sense of tranquillity, with recreational pressure related to increase in traffic levels on narrow winding lanes identified as a force for change likely to diminish this. As the site is largely undeveloped land bounded by hedgerows and a quiet, narrow lane, it positively contributes towards the landscape character of the area.
17. The proposal includes a camping pod, field shelter, toilet and sanitary block, use of the land for camping, and screen planting in the north eastern corner. The camping pod is relatively well enclosed amongst existing outbuildings associated with Rosemary Cottage and there is no dispute that this has a limited impact on the landscape.
18. The small field shelter and proposed sanitary block would be in the northern part of the field, away from the domestic garden and outbuildings. Whilst modestly scaled, these would be isolated buildings in the open countryside. I note that the site would not accommodate caravans and that some tents are earth toned. However, due to the size of the site, a substantial number of tents could be spread over a large area. Although it is not nationally designated, the introduction of buildings and a campsite onto existing open land would appear incongruous in this undeveloped landscape.
19. The appellant indicates that it would be a modest camping venture and that a condition could be imposed limiting the total number of individuals camping on the site and the nature and hours of certain permitted activities. Nevertheless, there is no such proposed condition before me, and the extensive size of the

site means that it could accommodate a large amount of camping pitches, significantly intensifying its use.

20. The existing boundary landscaping and small length of proposed planting would largely screen the scheme from the lane and other properties nearby. However, the vegetation could be removed, become damaged or diseased and may only provide screening in the spring and summer months. Further, the campsite would be evident in glimpsed views through the field access gap in the hedge, particularly to those travelling northbound along the road.
21. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would harm landscape character. This would be contrary to Policies TTV26, DEV20 and DEV23 of the JLP where they require proposals to have regard to the pattern of local development and to conserve landscape character, including being located to respect scenic quality and prevent erosion of relative tranquillity.

Other Matters

22. The land could be used as a recreational campsite for upto 60 days a year for upto 50 pitches and any reasonably necessary moveable associated structures under permitted development (PD) rights¹. There is a possibility that the fallback position could be implemented. However, the proposed location of permanent buildings on the site and its potential use for a campsite year-round would result in enduring changes to the landscape. These would be more significant than the short-term effects of a temporary use allowed under PD rights, and therefore I accord the fallback position limited weight.
23. The Council did not find harm or development plan conflict in relation to several other matters, including living conditions, heritage, ecology, trees, drainage, minimising use of resources, access and parking. However, even if I were to agree with the Council on these points, the absence of harm would be a neutral matter which would not carry weight in favour of the proposed scheme.

Conclusion

24. For the above reasons, the proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

A Wright

INSPECTOR

¹ Under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)