



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 February 2025

by Stewart Glassar BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3rd March 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/E2205/W/24/3352478

Coldharbour Farm, Knock Hill, Stone, Kent TN30 7JX

- 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 A Jempson against the decision of Ashford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is PA/2024/0720.
 - The development proposed is provision of a mixed agricultural and tourism office, together with a single holiday let accommodation above (alternative scheme to 20/01743/AS).
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for provision of a mixed agricultural and tourism office, together with a single holiday let accommodation above (alternative scheme to 20/01743/AS) at Coldharbour Farm, Knock Hill, Stone, Kent TN30 7JX in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref PA/2024/0720, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with drawing numbers:

Proposed Block Plan 2	- 161 - 24B
Proposed Elevations (Scheme 1)	- 161 - 22F
Proposed Floor Plans (Scheme 1)	- 161 - 21D

Notwithstanding the door/window openings shown on the proposed floor plan, drawing 161 - 21D, the northwest elevation shall be as per the elevation shown on drawing 161 - 22F.
 - 2) The part of the building annotated on plan 161 - 21D as 'self-catered holiday let' shall be used as holiday accommodation which shall exclude any occupation as a sole or main place of residence by any person.

Application for costs

2. A separate application for costs was made by Mr A Jempson against Ashford Borough Council. That application is the subject of a separate decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. At my site visit I noted that the building was partially constructed. Some of the openings and the extent of the brick plinth did not appear to accord with the submitted drawings. For the avoidance of doubt, I have based my decision on the submitted drawings.

4. However, the submitted drawings contain a slight discrepancy between the proposed northwest elevation and the floorplan. The elevation indicates a large double-door opening whereas the floorplan indicates a single door with windows either side. It seems to me that double doors would reflect the use sought for that part of the building and is likely necessary if the space is to be used as storage associated with the agricultural operations. I have therefore based my considerations on the elevation drawing and not the floorplan for this part of the building.
5. I have omitted from the description of development reference to the retrospective nature of the proposal as that is not an act of development.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the High Weald National Landscape.

Reasons

7. A mixed agricultural and tourism office, together with a single holiday let accommodation above was permitted on appeal in May 2023. The main difference between that scheme and the one now before me is the size and appearance of the proposed building. The building is in roughly the same position as previously approved, and it retains its broadly L-shaped layout. It would be approximately 42m² larger with its ridge being 0.8m higher.
8. Internally, the space is divided in much the same way as previously indicated albeit, the submitted drawings do not show any internal stairs to the upper parts of the storage areas (Barns C and D).
9. The key changes to the external appearance include the addition of an 'extension' to house the now required plant room and a new toilet, which necessitates the removal of the external stairs and entrance to the holiday let; the increased height which in turn sees an increased eaves height and the replacement of the dormer and rooflights serving the holiday let with three first floor windows; as well as changes across the building to the position and number of windows, doors and openings.
10. The High Weald National Landscape (HWNL) is an area which is characterised by its open, undulating countryside and sense of tranquillity. Clearly, farmsteads which include a mix of farmhouse/residential accommodation and agricultural buildings are an established part of the landscape. However, an over concentration of certain buildings or uses in such locations can sometimes have adverse effects, including on the character of the area. Consequently, the need to protect such areas and sensitive landscapes from inappropriate development and urbanisation is a legitimate one.
11. The proposed additional plant room adds to the size and scale of the building. However, it is designed to reflect the overall styling of the building and would be subservient to its main bulk with a lower ridge height. It would be positioned on the northeastern elevation, adjacent to an existing agricultural building. This in turn blocks some wider views of the additional built form and so helps to limit the extent of its visual impact.

12. A consequence of the new plant room is that the external staircase would now be omitted and access to the holiday let would be provided internally. However, this would not significantly alter the building's presence or appearance.
13. As now proposed, the building would be a similar height to that of the building opposite. Coldharbour Farm Barn, which is to the west of the appeal building has a sizable and large roof and when approaching the site along the access road both it and Coldharbour Cottage appear taller than the proposed building. Given that context and that the building as approved was already higher than the adjacent building, Barn A, the additional height would have limited effect on the prevailing environment.
14. The increased height and raised eaves does allow upper floor windows serving the holiday accommodation to be inserted. Replacing the small dormer and rooflights with these larger windows does give this part of the building a more overtly residential appearance. However, this would not necessarily be out of keeping with the permitted use.
15. Similarly, inserting new windows into the storage areas and reducing and repositioning some of the larger entrances does lessen the utilitarian appearance of the storage parts of the building and give it a more domestic character. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this would prevent the space being used for its intended purpose or that any additional light spill from the storage operations would be unduly harmful to the wider character of the area.
16. It is also evident that the various buildings next to and near the appeal building help to limit the extent to which some of the more notable revisions would be seen. I acknowledge that this does not prevent some views of the proposed building from the public footpath. However, not only do the existing buildings help to partially screen the building but they also provide a context within which it would be viewed.
17. These other buildings have a variety of styles, sizes, heights and external appearances. These include those with a residential character and those which are associated with the agricultural operations and have a more functional and utilitarian appearance. As such, having regard to this prevailing context and what was previously permitted, I do not find the appearance, size or height of the building as now proposed to be so out of keeping with the immediate context, or incongruous in this rural location, such that the overall effect would tip over into being unacceptable.
18. Accordingly, I find that the proposed changes do not harm the character and appearance of the area, including the HWNL. Consequently, the proposal accords with Policies ENV3b and EMP11 of the Ashford Borough Local Plan 2030, which, amongst other things, support the growth of tourism facilities whilst seeking to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape.
19. In these respects, the proposal would also accord with the broad objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024 -2028; and the National Planning Policy Framework which, amongst other things, seeks to ensure developments are sympathetic to local character, including landscape setting, and that National Landscapes are conserved and enhanced.

Other Matters

20. I note the Council's concerns regarding the residential character of the building. However, any changes of use to residential or any further alterations to the external appearance to facilitate such a change would be the subject of separate applications and for the Council to consider at that time. My decision has no bearing on the acceptability or otherwise of such further changes.

Conditions

21. As works purporting to be in relation to the proposal have commenced on site, the standard time limit condition is not necessary.
22. A condition listing the approved plans is necessary in the interests of certainty. I have addressed in this condition the discrepancy between the northwest elevation drawing and the floorplan for that part of the building.
23. As per the previous decision, it is necessary to ensure the holiday let accommodation is used for that purpose.

Conclusion

24. For the reasons given above, having considered the development plan as a whole, along with all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed subject to the conditions above.

Stewart Glassar

INSPECTOR