
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 February 2025

by Alison Scott (BA Hons) Dip TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 April 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/T9501/W/24/3355529

Moontree Lodge, B6341 Monkridge To Elsdon, Northumberland NE19 1AE

- 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 Capt. (Retd.) K Hargreaves against the decision of Northumberland National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref is 24NP0063.
 - The development proposed is Change of use of land for siting of storage container for equipment at Moontree Lodge, Elsdon, Northumberland, NE19 1AE
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The description of the proposal was amended by the National Park Authority. This description has been carried forward within the appeal banner heading as it is more succinct.

Main Issue

3. The main issue with regards to this appeal is whether or not the proposal would conserve and enhance the landscape character of the Northumberland National Park, and the effect upon intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located outside the settlement of Elsdon, situated within the Northumberland National Park and within the Northumberland countryside. The National Park is distinctive in character with its remote upland landscape of rich biodiversity, rural village settlements, significant woodland areas and sporadic dwellings outside settlements of a traditional vernacular, altogether enhances its special qualities. The appeal site conveys the unique character of the rural area with its hedgerows, uneven topography, open characteristics and sense of tranquillity.
5. Moontree Lodge is a modern residential bungalow and beyond its defined domestic curtilage the dwelling as a whole is surrounded by open land, much of it of a woodland characteristic. A metal container as proposed would be used for storage and sited on a level 'laydown' gravel area close to the boundary with the dwelling and accessed through a field gate. Various effects are stored here including timber pallets, crates, concrete slabs and sleepers, tyres and a trailer parked up. A raised mound has been created to the west side of the area and planted with single trees.

6. The proposed container is intended to function as storage for agricultural equipment to support the practices of the appellant who engages in willow for weaving, honey production and the keeping of livestock. At the time of my visit, I could see that the land is uneven and rises to the north and includes rows of tree planting. Parts of the land has been topped with grass to enable improved access as the appellant states they encourage accessible interaction for the disabled service people of the community. The appellant also requires a more level access due to their own mobility constraints.
7. In this rural area, natural stone materials, timber and glass are recognisable materials with external structures of a more rustic and traditional character that in the main respects the local landscape character. A metal shipping container of the scale proposed would not follow the traditional characteristics of the local area, even if it is finished green in colour. Its metal characteristics and appearance as a shipping container in this site context would not meet the high-quality requirements of local policy ST2 that aims to conserve and enhance the landscape of the National Park where new development should be of a high quality that makes a positive contribution to its special qualities. This ethos is also echoed in policy DM11 and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).
8. A container would appear visually strident within the landscape and I notice the existing effects that are stationed here are clearly visible from the main road to which this container would appear prominent given the exposed nature of the site. The appellant's belief is that planting and green screening would act as visual mitigation. However, it would take some years to establish, and I am not convinced hedging would appropriately screen the proposal. More immediate modifications to the structure by way of timber cladding and a steel pitched roof over has been suggested by the appellant and could be conditioned or fencing around it. In this sensitive location where the special landscape and visual qualities of the National Park should be protected, with no precise details of these measures before me, I am not satisfied that this would meet the six tests of paragraph 56 of the Framework.
9. Furthermore, as the site is located within the open countryside, in accordance with the Framework, the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside should be recognised. The industrial aesthetics of the container would not acceptably achieve this requirement.
10. The appellant points to other storage containers and metal buildings within the local area. I could see a number of metal containers upon my visit. Some of these I viewed where located in less conspicuous locations and others absorbed amongst existing buildings and therefore less visually obvious. Those that I could see did not share the same circumstances as the proposal before me. In any event, I am not aware of their precise details to allow me to comment further.
11. I understand from the appellant's evidence that the location is the optimum position for them and the accessibility requirements they need. I am conscious of my duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) contained within the Equality Act 2010 which sets out to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality and foster good relations between those with a protected characteristic and those who do not share it. The appellant is one with a protected characteristic for the purposes of the PSED. Disability is a protected characteristic.

However, it does not follow that the appeal should necessarily succeed, but rather that I have a duty to consider the implications of my decision upon this person.

12. As I have found, the container would harm the visual landscape and intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside in this sensitive location. Whilst the container would enable storage of tools and equipment, and tending to the land has wellbeing effects for the appellant, there is little information surrounding this, with no compelling evidence before me on how this container would positively impact their health, or by it not being there, would result in an adverse impact on them. Therefore, on balance I am not persuaded the benefits to the appellant's health is sufficient to outweigh the harm arising to the rural landscape.
13. I note biodiversity enhancement and restoration of the land forms part of the appellant's environmental benefits for the site and bee foraging opportunities to which the appellant's produce local honey. They comment on the decrease in water run-off and land erosion. They also point to security matters and the threat of crime locally, presenting some details from third parties with their appeal.
14. I am aware there are some environmental enhancements arising from the appellant's restoration of the land and I apply some weight to these. There are limited details surrounding water run-off improvements and erosion for me to consider further and I apply limited weight to this. There may be instances of theft within the local area although there are no precise details to allow me to fully consider the implications of such. Therefore, I apply only minor weight to this.
15. The appellant states they hold a County Parish Holding number which has been provided with their evidence. Even if the land is part of a registered agricultural holding there are limited details of the equipment and quantity reasonably needed to undertake their duties, to be stored on site. Also, it is not to say that this particular storage container is the only solution for the appellant to explore. I have read the letters of support received to the proposal. Be that as it may, I must consider the effect of the proposal as a whole.

Other Matters

16. Within the appellant's evidence he states their property being located within the 'village limits'. The Council confirm the site is located within the open countryside within the Northumberland National Park and its landscape character should be protected and the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside respected. They comment that the proposal is for no monetary gain and point to a new dwelling that they consider does not meet policy requirements. The details of this are not before me however.

Balance and Conclusion

17. The Northumberland National Park is a unique asset and should be conserved and enhanced, and the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside recognised. The proposal before me would adversely affect its special character and all things considered, there is nothing before me to outweigh the harm that would arise. The proposal would therefore not comply with the safeguarding aims of policies ST1 and DM11 of the Local Plan and the broad principles of Policy ST2 and the open countryside expectations of Policy ST4, and design aims of Policy DM8. Nor would it meet the expectations of the National Planning Policy Framework that requires

good design, to conserve and enhance the landscape and recognise the intrinsic beauty of the countryside.

18. I understand the outcome of the appeal would be disappointing for the appellant. I have considered all matters that have been raised and conclude that the proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other material considerations which lead me to determine the appeal otherwise than in accordance with it. Therefore, for the reasons given, the appeal is dismissed.

Alison Scott

INSPECTOR