



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 March 2025

by Graham Wraight BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 April 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/F4410/W/24/3351535

Moor Farm, High Bridge Road, Thorne, Doncaster DN8 5RY

- 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 Mark Bellamy against the decision of Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/01667/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the change of use from disused paddock to self build / custom home for the current owners.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - (i) whether the proposal would be an acceptable form of development with particular regard to the provisions of local policies in respect of the location of development;
 - (ii) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - (iii) the effect of the proposal on flood risk.

Reasons

Location

3. Policy 25 of the Doncaster Local Plan 2021 (LP) sets out the instances in which new dwellings will be permitted in the countryside policy area. This includes new dwellings to meet the essential needs of an existing agriculture, forestry, or other enterprise which justifies a rural location, where it can be demonstrated that there is a demonstrable functional need which relates to a full-time worker that cannot be fulfilled by an existing dwelling in the area. The appellant runs a caravan storage business on land adjacent to the appeal site. Whilst such a business is not one which necessarily justifies a rural location, it is nonetheless a longstanding and established operation in the area.
4. The primary needs set out by the appellant relate firstly to reducing the burden of commuting from their existing residence to the appeal site and secondly to matters of security. Their commute from their current home address is approximately 30 to 40 minutes each way and they state that they offer a service to allow customers to collect and return their caravans outside of normal business hours, meaning

multiple trips may be needed daily. They consider that an on-site presence would improve security and deter trespassers and criminals, with reference to the theft of one caravan having taken place and the theft of another being thwarted by the appellant's presence at the time. Their presence on-site would also allay the security related fears of the appellant's parents, who live next to the appeal site but no longer have involvement in the caravan storage business.

5. It is firstly necessary to establish whether there is a functional need for the appellant to live adjacent to their business. In terms of offering out of hours access, they do not quantify how often this occurs. However, in their submissions they refer to it being 'not unknown', which suggests more of an infrequent occurrence. Furthermore, although reference is made to two other caravan storage facilities in the area, it is not made clear whether such access is an industry wide norm or what implications it would have on the future viability of the business if it was a service that was no longer provided.
6. It is further stated that existing and potential clients are more likely to choose a storage site that offers 24/7 onsite security and support, but it does not appear that the business currently provides this. There is however reference made to the business expanding during the appellant's ownership and there being no need to advertise to get new business. If that is indeed the case, it does not appear that the current security arrangements are affecting the viability of the business. Whilst I accept that the permanent presence of the appellant would be a better situation for his parents, this does not help demonstrate a functional need in terms of the operation of the business.
7. I am not therefore persuaded on the basis of the evidence I have before me that a functional need has been demonstrated. However, even if there were such a need, Policy 25 requires consideration of whether the need can be fulfilled by an existing dwelling in the area. No assessment has been provided in that regard to show whether there are properties in the local area in which the appellant and his wife could reside. If such a property was available, this would significantly reduce the commuting time to and from the business and make short notice and out of hours attendance more palatable. Combined with the provision of security measures including CCTV, it also would mean that a more rapid response would be possible than at the present time to address security issues.
8. In conclusion therefore, the proposal fails to accord with Policy 25 of the LP, where it refers to the provision of new dwellings in the countryside policy area.

Character and appearance

9. As the appeal site is located within flood zone 3, the proposed dwelling would be elevated on stilts so that its living accommodation would be contained on the first floor only. The surrounding area is rural in character and although there are some two storey dwellings present such as the farmhouse at Moor Farm, these are generally modest in size and of a traditional appearance. Larger buildings do exist in the form of agricultural barns, but these are typical of buildings found in a rural area. Although the proposed dwelling would be faced in timber, it would not in my view resemble a converted agricultural building due to its form, its design and the nature of its elevation above the ground. Its appearance and visual impact would also be considerably at odds with existing buildings in the area for those same reasons.

10. The proposal would consequently stand out as an incongruous feature in the locality in which it would sit. The relatively flat topography of the surroundings and the absence of built development, in particular beyond the front boundary of the appeal site, means that vision can be taken from some considerable distances. Although there is an existing hedge and trees located along the frontage of the appeal site, this is not entirely effective in shielding views from all angles available from along High Bridge Road, may not be as effective at all times of the year and would be dependent upon its retention in the future. As a whole, the proposal would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area.
11. For these reasons, the proposal would not accord with Policies 33, 41, 42 and 44 of the LP where they collectively seek to promote good design and to protect character and appearance.

Flood risk

12. The Council's position on the sequential test is unclear as they attempt to tie the consideration back to whether there are existing dwellings which would provide an alternative to building a new dwelling. However, the purpose of the sequential test is to direct new development towards areas of the lowest flood risk, and therefore it would seem that separate policy strands have been conflated.
13. That said, the sequential test undertaken is primarily based upon finding a site that could accommodate both a new dwelling and the relocation of the caravan storage business. As I have found that the needs of the business could potentially be served from a dwelling in the surrounding area, it follows that the sequential test could reasonably be expected to consider plots of land on which a dwelling could be constructed in that area. And even if it was able to be demonstrated that the sequential test was passed on that basis, the exceptions test submitted relies on benefits arising from the continued operation of the business. As there is no substantive evidence provided to show that the viability of the business would be under threat in the absence of the appeal proposal and there is the potential that the needs could be met by an existing dwelling, it has not been shown that this would indeed be a benefit that could only be achieved by the appeal proposal.
14. The Council raises further concern about a sustainable drainage strategy, but the proposal received no objection from the technical consultees on that ground. There is therefore no reason to consider that the proposal would be unable to incorporate sustainable drainage, and this is a matter that could be addressed by way of a planning condition.
15. In conclusion, the submissions fail to demonstrate that the proposal would accord with Policy 57 of the LP where it sets out the requirements in respect of flood risk management and the location of new development.

Other Matters

16. It is stated that the proposed dwelling would be a self-build/custom home, but I have not been provided with a mechanism to secure it as such. Furthermore, no argument has been advanced by the appellant that the Council is not meeting its legal obligations with regard to self-build and custom build dwellings. Therefore, this consideration carries only limited weight, and it does not justify the harm I have found.

17. The proposal would mean that the appellant would not need to travel to the business, resulting in a reduction in the number of vehicle trips and an associated environmental benefit. However, trips from a dwelling in the surrounding area would also achieve a benefit compared to the existing distance travelled. I acknowledge that the proposal would give the appellant a better work/life balance than at present, but an existing dwelling in the area would also assist with this. That the proposal would provide a new dwelling carries limited weight in light of the quantum of development proposed and the policy conflicts that I have identified. No substantive evidence has been provided to demonstrate that it would cost more to buy an existing dwelling rather than build a new dwelling. These considerations also do not justify the harm that would be caused by the appeal proposal.
18. The existing business makes a contribution to the rural economy and the appellant highlights the contribution they personally make to the community and in terms of ecological enhancements that they have undertaken. However, there would appear to be no reason why these benefits could not be continued if an existing dwelling were utilised. This consideration does not therefore weigh in favour of the proposal.
19. The parties disagree as to whether the appeal site is 'isolated' for the purposes of Paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). However, even if it was not considered to be isolated, the policies of the development plan which seek to direct new development to the most sustainable locations, to protect character and appearance and to address flood risk are consistent with the aims of the Framework. Given that I have found there to be a conflict with those policies, the matter of whether the site is isolated is not determinative on the outcome of the appeal.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons given above, the appeal should be dismissed.

Graham Wraight

INSPECTOR