



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 June 2025

by Jane Smith MA MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/D3830/W/25/3358884

Floran Farm, Hophurst Hill, Crawley Down, West Sussex RH10 4LP

- 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 P Batten against the decision of Mid Sussex District Council.
 - The application Ref is DM/24/1274.
 - The development proposed is 'Change of use of land to storage allowing the siting of boats and caravans'.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. In the banner heading above, I have used the description given on the application form. The Council's decision referred to retrospective change of use. However, although there is an existing hardstanding on the site, at the time of my site visit there were no caravans or boats within the appeal site boundaries.
3. A concurrent appeal regarding change of use of an adjacent parcel of land to a camping site (APP/D3830/W/25/3358882) is the subject of a separate decision.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for the proposed storage use, having regard to national and local planning policies in respect of development to support the rural economy and the effect on the character and appearance of the countryside.

Reasons

5. The appeal site lies beyond the existing buildings at Floran Farm. It currently has a loose hardcore surface, with a grassed bund to one side. There is vegetation on two sides, comprising a very high conifer hedge to the east and a substantial deciduous hedgerow outside a close boarded fence to the north. The other two boundaries are open, and the site is on the opposite side of the access track from the proposed camping site. The buildings at Floran Farm are largely out of sight of the road. However, there is a public right of way adjacent to the appeal site, parallel to the conifer hedge to the east and across the small field to the north.
6. The site is within a larger area subject to a confirmed enforcement notice dating back to 1992, relating to the unauthorised change of use of land from agriculture to a mixed use which included storage and siting of an assortment of non-agricultural items and vehicles as detailed on the notice. At the time of the application, the

Council reported that the site was in use for storage of trailers, machinery and vehicles. At the time of my site visit, no such items were present, although there were a few scaffold poles and similar items up against the hedge.

7. The site is in the countryside, which Policy DP12 of the Mid Sussex District Plan adopted in 2018 (MSDP) states will be protected in recognition of its intrinsic character and beauty. Some development is permitted, provided it maintains or where possible enhances rural and landscape character and is either necessary for the purposes of agriculture or supported by another policy. Policy DP14 allows for new small-scale economic development in the countryside, provided it supports sustainable growth and the vitality of the rural economy and, where possible, utilises previously developed sites. The same policy includes qualified support for diversification of activities on existing farm units. However, both policies are to be read together, with Policy DP14 including an overall requirement that any such development does not conflict with Policy DP12.
8. In the East Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan, Policy EG2 does not include any express support for rural economic uses, other than small-scale proposals for agriculture or sport and recreation, or development to meet specific necessary utility infrastructure needs.
9. In the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), paragraph 88 says that planning decisions should, amongst other things, support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of businesses in rural areas and the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. Paragraph 89 recognises that such uses may need to be found beyond settlements but goes on to say that in those circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings.
10. Although the Council alludes to the 'intended agricultural use' of the land, neither the development plan nor the Framework require that only agricultural uses are supported in the countryside. Nor does the confirmed enforcement notice preclude consideration of an alternative use in the context of the current development plan and other material considerations. Nevertheless, both Policy DP12 and the Framework require that the effect on the character and appearance of the countryside is considered.
11. The appellant suggests that the existing hardstanding may have become established through the passage of time. That is not a matter for this appeal. In any case, areas of hardstanding are not unusual within rural holdings and the hard surface does not, in itself, have a significant effect on rural character. Caravans and boats may also be present in the countryside, but can be much more intrusive, particularly if large, numerous and/or stored in a tightly packed manner. No numerical limit is proposed, and the site could accommodate a sizable number of units. Any individual caravan or boat may not be a permanent fixture, but the application does not propose a temporary or otherwise short-term use, and the stored items would collectively have an enduring presence.
12. Although there are several buildings within the wider holding, the appeal site lies beyond them, at the interface with the adjacent open fields. The surrounding landscape is typically leafy and rural. The sporadic dwellings and other development outside Crawley Down are inconspicuous and the introduction of multiple caravans and boats would be an unwelcome further intrusion over and

above the existing uses on the holding. The use would be both more intensive and more visually jarring than the camping site which is the subject of the other appeal.

13. Although the land is not currently visible from the footpath to the east, at the time of my site visit there were some filtered views through the hedgerow along the northern boundary, over the top of the fence. In any case, reliance on natural vegetation to shield the use from view would not adequately safeguard rural character in the long term, since planting can be reduced in effectiveness through a variety of natural causes, such as disease, decay or wind damage. Even if a condition was imposed to secure reinforced planting, that would not be an adequate safeguard given the very close relationship between the site, the surrounding open fields and the public right of way.
14. There would be some economic benefit. Administration and management may generate some limited employment, over and above the existing management of the holding. But there is little evidence how the proposal would support the diversification of agricultural activities, since the holding appears to be largely used for vehicle repairs and a landscaping business and no specific details of agricultural activity in need of economic support have been presented. In any case, the support in the relevant policies for economic activity in rural areas is subject to consideration of the effect on the character and appearance of the area. In this case, in contrast to the proposed camping site, the effect would be materially harmful. Furthermore, while the appellant suggests that the site would be an optimal location for the use, there is no substantive evidence that dismissing this appeal would lead to caravan or boat storage on even less suitable sites.
15. I conclude that the appeal site is not an appropriate location for the proposed storage use, having regard to national and local planning policies in respect of development to support the rural economy and the effect on the character and appearance of the countryside. It would conflict with Policies DP12 and DP14 of the MSDP, when read together, and with Policy EG2 of the NP, as summarised above. It would also be contrary to relevant paragraphs in the Framework.

Other Matters

16. The site is not within a designated landscape and the Council has not alleged any harm in relation to the effect on heritage assets, flood risk, contamination, highway safety or other technical issues. Nor is any harm alleged to sites protected for their nature conservation value. There may be scope for enhancement of the biodiversity value of the site itself through additional landscaping. However, that would by no means outweigh the harm to the rural character of the area.

Conclusion

17. The proposed development conflicts with the development plan and no material considerations indicate that a decision should be made otherwise than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

Jane Smith

INSPECTOR