



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 March 2022

by Helen Smith BSc (Hons) MSc MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: Friday 29 April 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/21/3285475

Wellington Farm, Morridge Top Road, Bradnop ST13 7NG

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Michael Chafer against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
 - The application Ref SMD/2021/0371, dated 3 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 10 September 2021.
 - The development proposed is a guest accommodation lodge in the existing field at Wellington Farm.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are whether the proposal would represent a suitable location for tourism development, with regard to accessibility to services and facilities; and the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location of development

3. The appeal site is a field of rough grass adjacent to the farmhouse and outbuildings at Wellington Farm. It is accessed off Morridge Top Road, via a long private driveway. The surrounding area is undeveloped open agricultural land.
4. The appeal site is not located within any defined development boundary and, consequently, the site is located within open countryside where development is strictly controlled. It is located within the Churnet Valley, an area identified by the Council's Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD (2014). However, the site is not located within an area identified for tourism.
5. The appeal site is very remote and is not close to existing services or facilities. The nearest settlement is Leek, which is approximately 2.2 miles away. To access services and facilities in Leek, the visitors of the proposed lodge would have to use one of the public rights of way footpaths or walk/cycle along the roads. As the public footpaths are unlit, the routes would not be suitable for use outside of daylight hours. Along the roads, the visitors would have to share the carriageway with vehicles, as there is no separate footpath. Such routes would be unsuitable for children's pushchairs, wheelchair users or people with limited mobility.

6. Whilst a limited bus service operates in the area, the steepness of the single-track private driveway would make it difficult for a bus to access the appeal site. In addition, the steepness, length and condition of the private driveway to access Morridge Top Road would be unattractive to most people to walk or cycle along. These factors, combined with the absence of lighting, are likely to deter visitors from using sustainable travel options to access essential services in Leek, or limited services and facilities located elsewhere.
7. As a result, local services would not be readily accessible from the appeal site, even when taking account of supermarket deliveries, which may not appeal to all. Visitors to the appeal site would therefore be largely reliant on private vehicles to access services and facilities.
8. For the above reasons the proposal would not be a suitable location for holiday accommodation and would conflict with Policies E4 and SS10 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) (the Local Plan), which, amongst other matters, seek to reduce the need to travel by car by ensuring good accessibility to services and facilities and supports sustainable tourism developments.

Character and Appearance

9. The proposal would be sited in an elevated position on an existing plateau with panoramic views of the wider agricultural landscape. Whilst the rear of the proposal would be screened by a steeply rising hill, the front elevation would be exposed. Its physical separation from the farm buildings means that it would not be viewed in the context of the cluster of existing buildings. To that end, it would appear as an isolated building in the rural landscape to the detriment to its undeveloped character.
10. The building would be single-storey and constructed of modern materials, consisting of horizontal painted larch timber cladding, dark glazed aluminium windows and doors, a sedum green mono-pitch roof, and dark coloured flashing. The proposal also includes parking provision closer to the existing farm buildings and would be accessed on foot via a 'mowed' grass pathway, which would incorporate reinforcement mesh.
11. The extent of the glazing to the front elevation would have the potential to cause light pollution during hours of darkness, and glare and reflection on fine weather days. Inappropriate levels of lighting and glare within the site could accentuate the visual impact of the development on the wider landscape, particularly at night. Although a condition could be imposed to ensure the proposal was fitted with privacy solar glazing, this would not prevent light pollution arising from the development when doors and windows are open on fine weather days. To my mind, the harm which would arise could not therefore be mitigated through the imposition of such a condition.
12. Turning to the use of modern materials, although there are examples of timber boarding on agricultural buildings along Douse Lane, it is not a traditional rural material for Staffordshire Moorlands. The timber boarding on the sides and rear of the proposed holiday lodge would not be harmful on its own, as the proposal would be screened to the rear by the sloping bank. However, when combined with the modern glazed windows and door openings the resulting building would have a domestic appearance, which would have little resemblance to the

timber boarded buildings on Douse Lane or the farm buildings at Wellington Farm.

13. In addition to all of the above, the mowed grass pathway would further domesticate the visual appearance of the site and would further contribute to the harmful impact to the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside.
14. Therefore, to conclude on this matter, the proposal would be contrary to Policies DC1, DC3 and E4 of the Local Plan which, amongst other matters, seek to ensure that development does not have an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the countryside. The proposal would also conflict with the Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide SPD (2018), which outlines guidance to ensure development assimilates into the landscape and avoids adverse impacts on landscape quality.

Other Matters

15. The appellant has set out that part of the field to the west of the proposed lodge is being used as a caravan site, for up to 5 touring caravans, along with a camp site. This represents a fallback position for the appellant.
16. Notwithstanding that, a permanent holiday lodge would be larger than a touring caravan and therefore has the potential to be more visible within the landscape. The caravans and camping site would be positioned on the lower, more level section of the field, appearing less prominent than the proposed lodge. Caravan and camping visits are also likely to be seasonal, attracting tourists during the finer weather months and therefore unlikely to be all year round.
17. The appellant has confirmed that in the event of the proposal not being approved, the caravan and camping site would continue and there is no evidence to demonstrate that this is economically unviable.
18. In addition, I consider that the proposal does not offer any significant benefits when compared with this existing situation. I therefore conclude that the fallback position would not be as harmful as the proposal before me.
19. However, the appellant has also indicated that they would be willing to relinquish their Permitted Development rights to implement the caravan and camping site. It has been suggested that this could be dealt with by means of a suitably worded planning condition. Notwithstanding this, I consider that the appeal proposal does not offer any significant benefits when compared with this existing situation. With that in mind, the fallback position is not as harmful as the proposal before me and therefore the removal of the camping and caravan use would not tip the balance in favour of the appeal proposal.
20. The appellant has also drawn my attention to Policy SS11 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) (the Local Plan) which refers to the Churnet Valley Strategy and includes particular support for short and long stay visitor accommodation. Whilst may well be the case, the policy also seeks to ensure that proposals protect and enhance the landscape. In this case, I have found harm in respect of the character and appearance of the area and any policy support for such accommodation is outweighed by that harm.

21. I am also conscious that the the proposal would lead to some economic benefits with visitors using local visitor attractions. However, these benefits would not outweigh the harm that I have identified.

Conclusion

22. The proposal conflicts with the development plan, as a whole, and there are no material considerations worthy of sufficient weight that would indicate a decision other than in accordance with it. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

Helen Smith

INSPECTOR