



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 August 2022

by M Clowes BA (Hons) MCD PG CERT (Arch Con) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 07 September 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/21/3288537

Land off Stile House Lane, Thorncliffe, Nr Leek ST13 7LS

- 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 Mrs C Jackson against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
 - The application Ref SMD/2021/0465, dated 12 July 2021, was refused by notice dated 19 October 2021.
 - The development proposed is erection of 1no. holiday cabin, installation of ground mounted photovoltaic panels and formation of vehicular access.
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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 and the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location of Development

3. Located outside of any defined development boundary, the appeal site is within the open countryside where new development is limited for specific purposes. In conjunction with Policies SS10 and SS11 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020 (Local Plan), Policy E4 supports new tourism development including visitor accommodation, subject to compliance with one of several criteria. These include that the proposal has good connectivity with other tourist destinations, particularly by public transport, walking or cycling; or is in a location close to settlements where local services, facilities and public transport are available or, is in an area specifically identified for tourism development in the Churnet Valley Masterplan.
4. Turning to the first criterion of Policy E4 of the Local Plan, the site is not particularly well served by public transport. There is no train station nearby and the local bus is limited to an on-demand provision, that whilst serving potential nearby tourist destinations, is by advanced bookings only and limited to weekdays. Visitors to the proposed holiday cabin would therefore predominantly arrive from outside the area by car. It cannot be assumed that future occupiers of the proposed cabin would not make long car journeys during their stays. Whilst some visitors may make use of the bus service occasionally, the majority are likely to depend on their own private cars. That

would particularly be the case at evenings and weekends when the bus service does not operate.

5. Other than the nearby town of Leek, the appeal site would not be walkable to other tourist destinations. Whilst visitors may choose to visit the general countryside rather than specific tourist hubs, and therefore may choose to explore the local footpath network, this does not render the site accessible on foot. Visitors that want to access the facilities and services in Leek would have to walk along Stile House Lane and Thorncliffe Road, neither of which have pavements. Alternatively, visitors would have to use the public footpath which crosses several fields and meanders through a housing estate before joining the A53 Buxton Road. Both routes are predominantly unlit at night and would be unsuitable for parents with young children, wheelchair users or people with restricted mobility. Even then, the walk to the centre of Leek would be over 20 minutes long in one direction.
6. The appeal site is located on an advisory cycle route and visitors may explore the area by this mode of transport. The surrounding area is hilly but not to such a degree that it would exclude cyclists other than those of very proficient ability. However, the proposal does not make particular provision for secure cycle storage or parking to encourage this type of transport.
7. Given the distance to shops and services and the lack of suitable alternative forms of transport to the private car, the proposed development would not be in an accessible location. The proposal would not therefore comply with criterion 2 of Policy E4 of the Local Plan.
8. In terms of the third criterion of Policy E4, the appeal site is located within the Churnet Valley where both Policy SS11 and the Churnet Valley Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document 2014 (SPD) support proposals for the provision of visitor accommodation in principle. However, the appeal site is not one of the sites specifically identified for tourism development within the SPD. Whilst I recognise that the proposal would facilitate longer stays in the area that would be of benefit to the local tourism economy, the support for visitor accommodation in the development plan is not unqualified, but rather conditional on securing an appropriate sustainable location.
9. The occupants of the holiday cabin could be supplied by supermarket deliveries. However, the use of such a service could not be enforced and moreover, it would limit the contribution of visitor spends to the local economy.
10. Overall, I find that the site would not have good connectivity with other tourist destinations and amenities, particularly by modes of transport other than the private car. Consequently, the proposal would not be a suitable location for tourism development. It would conflict with Policies E4, SS10 and SS11 of the Local Plan which amongst other things, seek to ensure that new visitor proposals are in sustainable locations enabling good accessibility to services and tourist resources. Conflict is also found with paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which seeks insofar as it relates to sustainability, rural tourism development that respects the character of the countryside.

Character and Appearance

11. The appeal site consists of a field accessed off Stile House Lane via an existing field gate. Hedgerows form the southern and western boundaries, and a dry stone wall exists to the east. The appeal site is generally flat with the land rising up gently to either side. The surrounding area consists predominantly of rolling agricultural land.
12. The proposed cabin would be set against a copse of trees which forms the backdrop to the northern boundary of the appeal site. However, I saw that it would be fully open to views from Stile House Lane to the front and at a distance from the public footpath to Leek. Although constructed of timber the proposed cabin, due to its large number of openings and projecting porch, would have an overtly domestic appearance. Rather than having a simple recessive character with a muted palette of materials, the high window to wall ratio and mixture of solar panels and roof lights on the roof, would result in a cabin with a fussy and cluttered appearance. Given the large amount of glazing, light pollution from internal lights during hours of darkness and inclement weather is likely to be significant, accentuating the visual impact of the development on the landscape.
13. Due to its proposed position, an extensive swathe of track albeit of twin wheeling's, is required from the field gate around the periphery of the appeal site to the cabin and the relatively large turning and car parking area. As required by their purpose, the proposed solar panels would face south. Given their height above ground they are likely to result in glare and reflection that would draw the eye across the open field to a negative degree. The existing roadside hedgerow would do little to mitigate or soften the appearance of the proposed development given its distance, particularly in the winter months when not in leaf. The proposed hedgerow along the track and to the front of the cabin and solar panels, would take a significant amount of time to establish before providing a good degree of screening. Nevertheless, such an incursion into the field would emphasise the residential nature of the development, to the detriment of the rural setting.
14. The proposed cabin would be set apart visually from the existing small-scale equestrian building which nestles into the established tree planting to the east, and the buildings at Hollystones, on higher ground some distance to the west.
15. I do not find that the proposed development would be grouped with existing buildings, nor is its form reflective of traditional buildings characteristic of the local area as required by the landscape planning guidelines set out within the Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). Given the totality of the proposed development including the cabin, track, fence, hedgerow, car parking area and ground mounted solar panels, I find that the small scale field bounded by trees and hedgerows, a defining characteristic of the Ancient Slope and Valley Farmlands character type of the LCA, would be significantly harmed through the provision of intrusive built development.
16. I find the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. As such it conflicts with Policies SS10, SS11, E4 and DC3 of the Local Plan (2020) which amongst other things, collectively seek to ensure that development is of a high standard of design that conserves, enhances and responds sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape. It

would also conflict with paragraph 84 of the Framework which requires sustainable rural tourism that respects the character of the countryside.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

17. The proposal for a holiday cabin would help to support a prosperous rural economy through enabling greater visitor spends from increased overnight stays within the local area. However, the benefits in these regards from a single unit of accommodation, would be relatively modest and would not subsequently outweigh the adverse effects I have found would be caused in relation to the main issues. For the above reasons, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework and all other relevant material considerations, the appeal is dismissed.

M Clowes

INSPECTOR