



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 May 2018

by **Stephen Normington BSc DipTP MRICS MRTPI FIQ FIHE**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 June 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/N2535/W/17/3190700

Mantex, Thonock Road, Wharton, Gainsborough DN21 3NP

- 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 T Marshall against the decision of West Lindsey District Council.
 - The application Ref 136466, dated 6 July 2017, was refused by notice dated 13 October 2017.
 - The development proposed is the change of use from grazing/grassland to a Touring Caravan site.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - Whether the proposal would be appropriately located, having regard to the Council's spatial strategy for sustainable rural tourism with particular regard to the location of the site in the open countryside.
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
 - The effect of the proposal on the living conditions of the prospective occupants of the manager's accommodation with particular regard to noise and disturbance associate with the proximity of the railway line.

Reasons

Whether or not appropriately located

3. The appeal site comprises a triangular parcel of land currently used for grazing and bounded by a railway line embankment to the north and Wharton Road to the south. The Council indicates that the site lies approximately 0.7 miles outside of the settlement of Blyton and is connected to the village by an unlit footpath. The surrounding area comprises predominantly agricultural land. For planning purposes the site lies within the open countryside.
4. The proposal would involve the change of use of the site to a touring caravan park with 20 pitches, one of which would be used as manager's accommodation, and would involve the construction of a toilet block and office.

A mobile home and blockwork garage are currently located on the site. The appellant indicates that the proposal would contribute to the array of tourist facilities and accommodation in the area.

5. The Council's approach to the consideration of a 'Sustainable Visitor Economy' is set out in Policy LP7 of the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan 2017 (CLLP). This policy, amongst other things, indicates that visitor facilities and accommodation should be located within existing settlements, or as part of planned urban extensions, unless it can be demonstrated that such locations are unsuitable for the nature of the proposal and there is an overriding benefit to the local economy and/or community and/or environment for locating away from such built up areas; or it relates to an existing visitor facility which is seeking redevelopment or expansion.
6. In this case the proposed change of use does not relate to an existing visitor facility. Furthermore, I have no evidence to demonstrate that the proposal could not be reasonably located within the existing settlement or that there is an overriding benefit to the local economy and/or community and/or environment for locating away from such built up areas. Given the isolated and countryside location of the appeal site, the proposed development would be contrary to the locational provisions of Policy LP7.
7. Paragraph 28 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) supports sustainable rural tourism. However, the Council have argued that the site is not suitable for such use due to its unsustainable location. However, paragraphs 7 and 8 of the Framework advise that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental that should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system. I will now consider each of these in turn.
8. The proposal would generate short term employment opportunities during the construction phase and would provide for a permanent manager with other associated indirect jobs. The occupation of the pitches would also provide a contribution to help support local tourism facilities. These economic and social benefits would gain some support from the Framework. However, these benefits must be balanced against any adverse impacts.
9. Although the Framework takes some account of the transport shortcomings of rural areas, its focus is on maximising the use of sustainable transport solutions. Even though the appeal site is connected to the village by a footpath link, this is unlit and is located adjacent to A159 where the national speed limit of 60mph applies. In my view, this would likely mean that walking and cycling to access the limited facilities in Blyton would be an unattractive option. In addition, the Council suggest that the nearest bus stop is just under a mile away within the village and therefore access to the site by public transport is limited.
10. It is evident that the proposal would place a high reliance on the use of the car. Even though the proposal is for visitor accommodation which to some extent would support the local economy and other tourist facilities, I consider that the location of the appeal site and the corresponding need to travel by car would not accord with the environmental dimension of sustainability. Whilst the occupants of the proposed pitches would make use of the services and facilities in nearby settlements which would support their vitality, they would be doing so using unsustainable transport means.

11. The proposal would provide for one of the pitches to be used for the purposes of a manager's accommodation. I have no evidence to suggest that this would be occupied other than on a permanent basis. Policy LP2 of the CLLP limits development within the countryside to that which is demonstrably essential to the effective operation of agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation, transport or utility services. As the caravan park is currently not established, such accommodation would not meet the requirements of any of the stated exceptions within Policy LP2.
12. Taking the above factors into account, the proposed development would therefore not enable the three dimensions of sustainability to be jointly and simultaneously achieved. Consequently, I find that the proposal would not lead to a sustainable form of tourism development in this rural area. It would also conflict with the overall locational objectives of Policies LP2 and LP7 of the CLLP.

Character and appearance

13. The Council indicates that the West Lindsey Character Assessment identifies the appeal site as being located within the Tile Valley character area which notes that the balance between clustered villages and their adjacent, outlying farmsteads is an important characteristic. It further indicates that new development should be sited and designed to conserve this pattern by encouraging relatively dense development within villages and conserving key tracts of open farmland between villages and outlying farms. Whilst this assessment affords no statutory protection, it nevertheless does recognise the contribution that the open rural nature of the area between villages and farmsteads makes to the landscape character.
14. Although the site may not be fully occupied all year, the formation of the pitches, buildings, gates and infrastructure within the open countryside would result in the loss of the current rural appearance of a large portion of the site and a more developed character would prevail. The caravans, which would predominantly likely be of a white external colour in this isolated countryside location would appear as being relatively prominent and intrusive within the context of the rural landscape. The proposal would result in the site having the appearance of being partially urbanised in the countryside. As such, it would fail to conserve the open rural character of the landscape.
15. Although the railway line embankment and mature vegetation alongside the A159 provides a degree of screening, the site would be visible from Wharton Road from where it would appear as an unsympathetic partially developed site within the open countryside. The eastern part of the site already has a partial urbanised appearance due to the static caravan, garage, driveway and gates. The appearance and rural character of the area in both views from the road and the wider countryside would be further unacceptably changed and a more developed character would prevail.
16. I noted at my site visit that planting has been provided along the boundary of the site with Wharton Road which would to some extent screen the caravan pitches. However, such planted features are impermanent and cannot be relied upon to mitigate the visual impact of the proposal as they can be removed. Moreover, any formal landscaping within the context of the site's countryside location would be an alien feature within this part of the rural landscape and would further add to the incongruity of the development.

17. Overall, I consider that the proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area contrary to Policy LP17 of the CLLP. This policy, amongst other things, seeks to protect and enhance the intrinsic value of the landscape. Furthermore, the proposal would also be contrary to one of the core principles of the Framework, as set out in paragraph 17, in terms of the protection of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Living conditions

18. Although the site is located close to the railway line I noted at my site visit that this does not form part of a frequently used mainline route. As such, any noise from passing trains would likely be short and infrequent. The noise from a passing train would undoubtedly be heard by occupants of the touring caravans and the manager's accommodation. However, given the infrequency of such occurrence I do not consider that any noise generated would be of an extent that would cause any significant harm to living conditions of the occupants of the caravans or the manager's accommodation. Consequently, there would be no conflict with Policy LP26 of the CLLP which requires, amongst other things, that the amenities which the future occupants of neighbouring land and buildings may reasonably expect to enjoy must not be unduly harmed by or as a result of development.

Other matters

19. My attention has been drawn to an existing caravan site located on the 'other side' of Blyton which the appellant suggest is located approximately the same distance as the appeal site from the village boundary. Whilst I have no further evidence of where such site may be located, I noted at my visit the Blyton Park Holiday Site which was located close to the edge of the village. I have no evidence to indicate whether this, or any other site, benefits from a planning permission granted by the Council. Nor do I have any evidence of the planning considerations and circumstances that were relevant to the granting of any such permission. Consequently, I am unable to determine that the existence of a nearby site has any material bearing on the circumstance in this appeal. In any case, I have determined this appeal on its own merits.

Conclusion

20. For the above reasons, taking into account the development plan as a whole based on the evidence before me and all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Stephen Normington

INSPECTOR