
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 November 2016

by Debbie Moore BSc (HONS) MCD MRTPI PGDip

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 9 December 2016.

Appeal Ref: APP/B9506/W/16/3156405

Land adjacent to Sydney Cottage, Salisbury Road, Plaitford, Romsey, SO51 6EE

- 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 Miss Jeb Farrah against the decision of New Forest National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref 16/00244, dated 16 December 2015, was refused by notice dated 16 May 2016.
 - The development proposed is described as: "Proposal for the demolition of a cluster of farm storage buildings and the construction of a new business premises offering a range of holistic therapies".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. I have taken the site address from the appeal form as this is more relevant to the site than that given on the application form.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are: (i) the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area; (ii) the effect of the development on highway safety and; (iii) whether the development would result in the loss of essential back-up grazing land.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site comprises a field containing a group of three agricultural buildings; a brick barn, an open fronted timber barn and a storage container. The site adjoins the A36, Salisbury Road, and is accessed via an existing field gate. There is a pair of demi-detached houses to the east, a paddock to the south and wooded area to the west.
 5. The appeal proposal is to replace the existing agricultural buildings with a new building that would be used as a centre for holistic therapies. The scheme includes car and cycle parking at the front of the site.
 6. The site lies on the northern edge of the New Forest National Park, in the small settlement of Plaitford. Although there is other development in the vicinity, the
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site is not within a defined village as identified in the Core Strategy.¹ The policies of the Core Strategy seek to enable an appropriate level of employment development in the most sustainable locations, whilst strengthening the well-being of rural communities. The policies also seek to restrict development that would adversely affect the special qualities of the National Park, which has the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.

7. Policy CP14 of the Core Strategy aims to restrict small scale employment development outside of the defined villages to that which helps the well-being of local communities. Such schemes will be permitted through the re-use or extension of existing buildings, the redevelopment of existing business use employment sites, farm diversification or home-working. The proposal would provide a service that could be considered to help the well-being of the local community. However, the proposal would be a new building, as opposed to a conversion, and would not form part of an existing employment site or farm. Nor could it be considered to be home working. Consequently, the proposal would not meet the requirements of Policy CP14.
8. The Authority also refers to Policy DP19 which relates to the re-use of buildings outside the defined villages and Policy DP17 which enables the limited extension of existing non-residential buildings. The scheme would not fall within the remit of these policies as it would involve the replacement of the existing buildings.
9. I have considered whether the development could be considered a local community facility under Policy CP10 of the Core Strategy, which supports proposals which are of clear and direct benefit to the local village or rural community. However, the development would be a commercial venture as opposed to a community facility. Whilst it would offer a service, the holistic centre would not be a clear and direct community benefit to the local population and consequently it would not meet the aims of the policy.
10. The existing buildings are low profile utilitarian type structures that integrate with the rural landscape, despite their poor state of repair. The new building would have a higher ridge height which would make it more visible and more prominent in views from the road. Also, the car parking area and associated activity would have a greater impact on the site than the existing buildings and land use, which would erode the rural character of the area. I appreciate that there is a hedge fronting the site which could be supplemented to provide an element of screening. However, alterations to the vehicular access would be required and the landscaping would be restricted by the need to provide adequate visibility splays either side of the access. Moreover, the altered access would contribute to the suburbanising effect of the development. Consequently, the development would be in conflict with Policies CP8 and DP1 of the Core Strategy, which seek to protect local character and distinctiveness.

Highway Safety

11. The development would utilise the existing access onto the A36, which is a classified trunk road. Highways England has advised that a higher grade access

¹ New Forest National Park Local Development Framework: Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (December 2010)

is required, and no details have been provided in relation to the revised layout of the access or the achievable visibility splays.

12. I saw from my site visit that the A36 is a busy road, with relatively fast moving traffic in both directions. Visibility for vehicles exiting the site would be restricted to the west by trees, which appear to be on land beyond the appellant's control. Visibility to the east would be impeded by a dip in the road. It is important that adequate visibility splays are provided to ensure safe and suitable access to the site can be provided for all people. In the absence of any drawings showing the layout of the access and the visibility splays, I conclude that it has not been demonstrated that relevant standards in relation to highway safety can be achieved. Consequently, the development would not meet the aims of Policies DP1 and CP19 of the Core Strategy which seek to avoid adverse impacts associated with traffic and to promote safer access.

Grazing land

13. The Authority advises that site benefits from commoning rights to turn out stock, associated with Plaitford Common. The text to Policy CP17 of the Core Strategy explains that the practice of commoning is integral to the maintenance of the landscape character and cultural heritage of the National Park, and commoners require back-up grazing in addition to the historic areas of common grazing.
14. The appellant has questioned the validity of the commoners designation. Nevertheless, the Clerk to the Verderers states that "the property and land benefits from the right to turn out stock onto Plaitford Common". It is apparent, therefore, that the site is identified as back-up grazing land, and this would be lost by the development. Consequently, the development would not comply with Policy CP17, which seeks to maintain the supply of land available for back-up grazing.

Other Matters

15. I have noted the comments from interested parties about matters of land drainage. However, as I have found the proposal to be unacceptable for the reasons given above, it has not been necessary for me to consider this issue in detail.

Conclusion

16. I have considered the letters of support for the scheme, and I note that there has been support via social media. I appreciate that the centre would provide a facility that many people would welcome, and the development provides the opportunity for environmental benefits such as ecological enhancements and the use of renewable energy. However, it is a statutory requirement that all planning applications and appeals must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case, the development would not comply with the development plan (the Core Strategy). The identified benefits are relatively limited and do not outweigh the conflict with local and national planning policy. Consequently, for the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Debbie Moore Inspector