



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 August 2018

by Thomas Hatfield BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 20th September 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/L3245/W/18/3198157

Highfield Farm, Hilton, Bridgnorth, WV15 5NZ

- 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 Mark David Steele against the decision of Shropshire Council.
 - The application Ref 17/02428/FUL, dated 17 May 2017, was refused by notice dated 19 September 2017.
 - The development proposed is described as "*change of use from agricultural land to a glamping site. To provide 5 temporary wooden structures and temporary bell tent along with a kitchen area and WC/shower block*".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The development has already been constructed and the appeal is therefore retrospective in nature.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - (a) Whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') and development plan policy;
 - (b) The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - (c) Whether the proposal is in an accessible location as required by development plan policy;
 - (d) If the proposal is inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Inappropriate development in Green Belt

4. Paragraph 145 of the Framework states that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions. One such exception is the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and

outdoor recreation; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

5. The development consists of a number of small structures that are located on formerly agricultural land. These structures are used as holiday accommodation and therefore do not represent a facility for outdoor sport or recreation. In this regard, Paragraph 145(b) of the Framework does not extend to visitor accommodation such as this.
6. The development has introduced new buildings onto land that was previously open and used for agriculture. In my view, it constitutes an encroachment into the countryside, and therefore conflicts with one of the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. In this regard, there is nothing in the Framework to suggest that this purpose only applies to larger developments. In addition, for the reasons set out below, I consider that the development fails to preserve the openness of the Green Belt.
7. I conclude that the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which Paragraph 143 of the Framework states is harmful by definition and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The proposal is also contrary to the relevant sections of Policy CS5 of the Shropshire Core Strategy (2011) and Policy MD6 of the Shropshire Site Allocations and Management of Development Plan (2015), which seek to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development.

Openness

8. The development has introduced additional built footprint and volume onto land that was previously open. It is also clearly visible in longer views from the west and south west and appears as an encroachment into the countryside from these positions. The development therefore fails to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. The Framework advises at Paragraph 133 that openness is an essential characteristic of Green Belts, and the appeal proposal therefore causes harm in this regard.
9. I conclude that the appeal proposal fails to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. This further harms the objectives of the Green Belt to which the Government attaches significant importance.

Accessibility

10. Policy CS16 of the Shropshire Core Strategy (2011) encourages the development of visitor accommodation "*in accessible locations served by a range of services and facilities*". It further states that in rural areas, proposals must be "*close to or within settlements, or an established and viable tourism enterprise where accommodation is required*".
11. The appeal site is surrounded by open countryside and is some distance from services, facilities, and public transport connections. Whilst there is a farm shop at the end of the drive between the site and the B4176 that is some distance away, and the Council state that it is only authorised to sell goods produced on the associated farm. There are bus stops along the A454 to the south and east although the appellant states that services are hourly, which is infrequent. In any case, the routes to both the farm shop and the bus stops are along unlit tracks that generally have no footway. These are not attractive pedestrian routes, especially in poor light, which would discourage the use of

these facilities. Visitors to the site would therefore be heavily reliant on the use of a car or other vehicle.

12. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposal is not in an accessible location as required by development plan policy. It is therefore contrary to the relevant sections of Policies CS6 and CS16 of the Shropshire Core Strategy (2011), and Policy MD11 of the Shropshire Site Allocations and Management of Development Plan (2015). These policies seek to ensure, amongst other things, that new visitor accommodation is accessible to services and facilities.

Other considerations

13. The appellant states that the development provides a significant source of income to the business as a farm diversification project. In this regard, it is asserted that it helps to keep a small farming unit viable in a living working countryside. However, this line of reasoning would equally apply to most farm diversification projects. Moreover, this site could be separated from the agricultural business in the future, regardless of the appellant's current intentions.
14. Policy CS5 of the Shropshire Core Strategy (2011) encourages small-scale farm diversification schemes. However, that encouragement is caveated as being "*subject to the further controls over development that apply to the Green Belt*". Accordingly, the proposal does not accord with Policy CS5 in this regard.
15. The development is adjacent to a tall hedgerow and has limited visibility from the nearest roads. It is also constructed in natural materials such as timber, which are sympathetic to a rural setting. However, it is clearly visible in longer views from the west and south west and appears as an encroachment into the countryside from these positions.
16. The appellant states that the Council has granted consent for a number of developments in the surrounding area in more visually prominent locations. However, the Council states that these examples were either not inappropriate development in the Green Belt, or were constructed under permitted development rights. Moreover, I note that none of these examples proposed new visitor accommodation. They are therefore not directly comparable to the current appeal proposal.
17. It is common ground that the site was once identified as a Certified Location by the Caravan Club. However, the site has not been used for that purpose for some time. The proposal therefore does not represent an "*expansion of an existing established business*" (my emphasis) for the purposes of Policy CS5.
18. The development contributes to the rural economy and to the role of Shropshire as a tourist destination. However, these benefits are common to most forms of new visitor accommodation.

Other Matter

19. The accommodation structures are relatively lightweight and the appellant states that they could easily be removed. However, they are stationed on the site for most of the year and therefore do not comprise temporary structures.

Conclusion

20. The proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt and has reduced openness in this location. The Framework states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. Even when taken together, the other considerations in this case do not outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, and the poor accessibility of the appeal site. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. The development is therefore contrary to Policies CS5, CS6 and CS16 of the Shropshire Core Strategy (2011), Policies MD6 and MD11 of the Shropshire Site Allocations and Management of Development Plan (2015), and guidance contained in the Framework.
21. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Thomas Hatfield

INSPECTOR