
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 January 2015

by J A Murray LLB (Hons), Dip.Plan.Env, DMS, Solicitor

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

Decision date: 13 February 2015

Appeal Ref: APP/A2525/A/14/2218991

The Rose and Crown Public House, Low Road, Holbeach Hurn, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE12 8JN

- 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 The Rose and Crown Public House, c/o Mr E Parker against the decision of South Holland District Council.
 - The application Ref H09-1052-13, dated 2 December 2013, was refused by notice dated 7 May 2014.
 - The development proposed is an extension to Rose and Crown Public House and extension to caravan site.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on (i) the character and appearance of the area; and (ii) neighbours' living conditions, in terms of noise and disturbance.

Reasons

3. The Council has no objection to the extension to the Rose and Crown public house (the pub), but the appellant makes it clear that this is part of a package with the caravan site extension, as each could not survive without the other. I have not therefore considered granting permission for the pub extension on its own.
4. The appeal site lies on the fringe of the small and tranquil village of Holbeach Hurn. Aside from the church and village hall, the pub appears to be the only amenity in the village.
5. When approaching the appeal site from the north east along Marsh Road, an existing copse provides effective screening, even during the winter. Whilst that copse is not in the appellant's ownership, it seems likely that it would remain for the foreseeable future. However, between the copse and the pub, the site access and gaps in the roadside hedge allow some public views of the existing caravan site. At the time of my visit, the visual impact of those views was limited by the fact that there were only 14 touring caravans on the site, in addition to the 12 static caravans.

6. The proposal is to extend the caravan site into the field to the east. There has been some confusion over numbers, but the existing site has planning permission for 43 touring caravans, granted in 1988 under Ref H09-0520-88 (the 1988 permission). However, the current site licence under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 restricts the total number of caravans that can be stationed there to 35. The appellant acknowledges that current spacing requirements limit the existing site capacity to that extent. The existing site also has the benefit of a lawful development certificate (LDC), Ref H-09-0908-09 dated 22 March 2010, for the stationing of "up to 12 caravans for occupation between 1 March and 31 October the same year by seasonal workers". The LDC does not specifically refer to "static caravans", but there are 12 static caravans currently on the site.
7. Notwithstanding the terms of the 1988 permission, having regard to the licence, the reality is that the current capacity of the existing site is 35 caravans, comprising 12 static and 23 touring caravans. The proposal would add 27 caravans in an adjoining field. This would create a total capacity of 50 touring and 12 static caravans on the appellant's overall site. I am not persuaded by his argument that I should consider the proposal as being for just 7 additional caravans, notwithstanding the 1988 permission for 43. I will look at the reality of the situation under the site licence. In any event, the appellant's contention ignores the 12 static caravans.
8. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) encourages support for sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations. Although the South Holland Local Plan (LP) was adopted in 2006, saved LP Policy LT7 is consistent with the Framework. It specifically relates to caravan sites and is the key development plan policy in this case. The supporting text recognises the economic benefits that caravan sites can deliver and the policy itself indicates that proposals for new, or extensions to existing, holiday caravan sites will be permitted if specified criteria are met. The criteria in Policy LT7 include that the development is suitably landscaped and screened to prevent an unacceptable visual impact on the countryside and that it is small scale and related to the capacity of existing facilities and services in the area. I shall deal with the question of scale first, as this clearly has a bearing on visual impact.
9. Policy LT7 does not generally indicate what is meant by small scale, but the statement in the supporting text that proposals for static caravan sites exceeding 20 pitches will not normally be acceptable provides some measure of guidance. I also note that the Council granted permission Ref H05-0651-11 in November 2011 for a 30 pitch touring caravan site at Fleet Hargate and indeed I viewed that site unaccompanied. It is close to the A17 and within walking distance of Fleet Hargate, a larger village than Holbeach Hurn, which offers some modest facilities, including a post office/shop, pub and bus services (though I have no evidence of how extensive these area). The officer's report to committee indicates that a previous proposal on that site for an 80 pitch scheme was rejected on appeal. The Inspector concluded that it would not be small scale and that a large number of caravaners would go further afield in search of food and other goods and services, using their private cars. The Council found the scale of the 30 pitch scheme acceptable and the officer's report noted evidence in a supporting statement that previous caravan rallies

on that site had resulted in a direct economic benefit to the area. Furthermore, the proposal included fishing and wildlife facilities, when the main on-site activities listed by caravaners were fishing and nature observation, in addition to relaxation, walking and cycling to nearby villages, shops and restaurants.

10. Although the scheme before me is only for a 27 pitch extension, it is necessary to look at the cumulative position; LP Policy LT7 cannot sensibly be interpreted to allow successive small scale extensions without regard to the consequent scale of the overall development. As indicated, this proposal would result in a 62 pitch overall site, comprising 50 touring caravans and 12 static caravans, when the supporting text to LP Policy LT7 suggests that sites accommodating more than 20 static caravans are normally unacceptable. In the context of the tranquil setting of Holbeach Hurn, I am not persuaded that the proposal is small scale, or related to the capacity of existing facilities and services on the site and in the locality, notwithstanding the proposal to provide a new dining room and small shop in the pub extension.
11. Low Road is at a higher level than the appeal site. Notwithstanding the existing screening, the regimented rows of closely spaced caravans, arranged around an access road and central shower block¹, would be apparent and the proposal would represent a somewhat suburban incursion into the existing open field. The planned planting around the proposed bio-disc treatment plant in the north east corner of the site would not significantly soften that impact and the overall site, as extended, would appear disproportionate in this location. I conclude on the first main issue, that the proposal would not be small scale and it would harm the character and appearance of the area, contrary to saved LP Policy LT7.
12. Turning to neighbours' living conditions, one of the other criteria in LP Policy LT7 is that the development should not harm the amenity of local residents. The nearest neighbours to the proposed extension are at The Spinney to the north east. This is a substantial house in extensive landscaped gardens. I note the separation distance and an existing 3m high earth bank. Nevertheless, given the low level of background noise in this location, extending the caravan site towards the neighbours' dwelling and garden and adding a further 27 caravan pitches would increase the level of noise and disturbance and the planting proposed around the bio-disc treatment plant would do little to lessen this. I conclude that the proposal would be harmful to neighbours' living conditions, in further breach of LP Policy LT7.
13. The proposal gives rise to no conflicts with the remaining criteria of LP Policy LT7, which could not be addressed through conditions. There is also some identified need for the development. In particular, the Holbeach and District Wildfowling Association refers to the extensive membership of wild-fowling clubs in the area. It states that affordable accommodation is hard to come by and the proposal would be of great benefit in the winter months. However, that benefit would be somewhat diminished by the need, on the advice of the Environment Agency, to prevent occupation of the appeal site from November to mid March, to reduce the risk of loss of life during a flood event.
14. In terms of general tourism, there are significant attractions within an hour's drive and the marshes and quiet country lanes offer opportunities for walking

¹ There is no objection to the design of the shower block in itself.

and cycling. Furthermore, whilst there was strong local opposition to the proposal, there was also a significant measure of support, including a petition and indeed the Council's planning officer recommended conditional approval. I also note the benefits that the shop and restaurant facilities would offer to the local community beyond the site, the support that the scheme would provide for the pub in a very difficult climate and the improved facilities for the caravan site itself. However, none of these factors outweighs the harm identified on the main issues and the conflict with the development plan.

15. Having regard to my conclusion on the main issues and all other matters raised, I am satisfied that the appeal should be dismissed.

J A Murray

INSPECTOR