
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 January 2018

by Jonathan Hockley BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th February 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/17/3183111

The Chalkpit, Hoddern Farm, Hoddern Farm Lane, Peacehaven BN10 8AR

- 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 & Mrs E Haunton against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref SDNP/17/02742/FUL, dated 26 May 2017, was refused by notice dated 3 August 2017.
 - The development proposed is the conversion and extension of existing agricultural building to create a new dwelling.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in this case is whether the proposed development would provide a suitable site for housing, having regard to the character and appearance of the landscape and natural beauty of the National Park.

Reasons

3. Peacehaven as a settlement has a fairly rigid line of development along its north eastern side with very little development evident in the fields to the west. This pattern is slightly broken by a grouping of a small number of dwellings and agricultural/light industrial units opposite the junction of Glynn Road and Pelham Rise; however, the agricultural appearance of many of these buildings and the concrete surface of the access into the site, as well as the visibility of the surrounding fields, gives this grouping the character of a rural enterprise.
4. The access through the cluster carries on to the east, passing through an area of purely open countryside and then heading north east when it comes to a grouping of dwellings based at Hoddern Farm. These dwellings largely appear to have been created as conversions of previous farm buildings. The main access track skirts around the side of these buildings, with a spur at the northern side to access the Farmhouse itself. The spur then heads east between converted farm buildings before tracking north east where it ends in the entrance to an old chalkpit. The chalkpit, as its name suggests, forms a bowl shaped area in the land. The pit is now largely grassed, with a range of scrub and trees located around the fringes and sides of the pit.
5. Within the pit lies an existing building. This is constructed in flint rubble with red brick quoins, with its east elevation, facing into the pit having timber infill.

The building has a hipped tin roof. To the north of the building, and much wider than the structure lies a range of red brick walls. These appear to have previously formed some sort of enclosure.

6. The proposal seeks to convert the building into residential use, extending the property with an extension to the north within the red brick enclosure. The original building would be converted into a kitchen/diner and reception hall and rooms, with the large 2 storey extension to rear housing 4 bedrooms over the 2 floors, as well as various family rooms.
7. As the site is located in a bowl, views of the site and the existing building are hard to come by, and are only really possible from the gated entrance to the site at its southern end. Paragraph 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) says that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. New isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided unless there are special circumstances, such as the essential need for a rural workers dwelling, where the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset, where the development would reuse redundant or disused buildings, or the exceptional quality or innovative nature of the design of the dwelling.
8. The decision notice refers to 4 development plan policies. Policies CP10 and CP11 of the Joint Core Strategy¹ together state that within the National Park development will be resisted if it fails to conserve and appropriately enhance its rural and historic landscape qualities and its natural and scenic beauty. High quality design will be sought in all new development which respects, and where appropriate, positively contributes to the character and distinctiveness of the Districts unique built and natural heritage. Policy ST3 of the Local Plan² says that development should respect the scale, height, massing, alignment, site coverage, character of neighbouring buildings, and the local area more generally. Finally policy GP50 of the South Downs Plan³ states that housing development should be closely matched to the social and economic needs of local people and be of a high design and energy efficiency.
9. In relation to paragraph 55 I consider the proposal is in an isolated position. While there is a domestic garden along the western boundary of the site, residential uses at the southern point of the site, and I note the historical status of the chalk pit forming part of the Hodder Farm area, there are open fields to the north, east, and south east of the pit. The site is physically divorced from the cluster of buildings at Hodder Farm, and furthermore I consider that the very nature of the chalkpit and its secluded quality set in a bowl with few glimpses of other properties gives the site an air of seclusion and isolation.
10. In reaching this view I have considered an appeal⁴ submitted in evidence, where an Inspector considered that a site on the north east side of Peacehaven was not isolated due to its proximity to the existing settlement. That site was located immediately adjacent to the edge of the main settlement. However, this is a different case from the one before me, where the adjacent domestic

¹ Lewes District Local Plan Part 1 Joint Core Strategy 2010-2030, June 2016 (for SDNPA areas)

² Lewes District Local Plan, March 2003

³ South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan

⁴ APP/P1425/A/14/2214658

uses, such as they exist, form part of a clustering of farm and former farm buildings that are themselves set in the countryside, as opposed to being part of the suburban form of the settlement.

11. The proposal would reuse a largely disused building. A historical assessment has been submitted which considers that the building would have likely been a cart shed, with the east side used to access the buildings by carts which would have been used to carry the chalk from the pit to elsewhere. The assessment contains a range of historical maps, which appear to show the building in place from around 1806. Structures to the north of the building (and south) appear in situ from 1927.
12. The building is clearly of significant age. However it has been much altered over the years, with a mainly modern roof structure, iron sheeting roof and breeze blocks and timber infill to the east side. The flint walls and roof tie beams do appear however to be of considerable age. The building therefore has a degree of historical interest and value, although it is not listed or designated. The significance of the building lies within its historical form, purpose, structure, and setting within the chalkpit.
13. The proposed extensions to the building would be significantly larger than the size of the original structure, with the double plan pitched roof form of the scheme being considerably higher than the cart shed and the plan form of the structure being both longer and wider than the form of the shed. When viewed from the south, east and north, the scale, height, massing, alignment, and site coverage of the proposed extension would dominate and overwhelm the original building, which itself would be significantly altered on its eastern side with flint walling infill and large areas of glazing giving little indication of the previous likely open sided nature of the cart shed. A proposed porch on the south side, while simple in form, would also serve to dilute the simple vernacular form of the hipped roof cart shed.
14. The wide range of glazing and irregular shaped and positioned windows on the east of the proposed new building would also detract from the simple character of the cart shed. In such a way the proposal would cause significant harm to the significance of the original building and would not lead to an enhancement of the immediate setting of the disused building.
15. For similar reasons, while I note the proposed environmental credentials of the proposed building, I do not consider that the dwelling is of exceptional quality or especially innovative, and would not help to raise the standard of design in the area. While I can appreciate that the site itself is reasonably unique, given its location, history and the building within it, I do not consider that the proposal would constitute a special circumstance such as provided for in paragraph 55 of the Framework.
16. The proposal would be sited well within the area delineated by the existing red brick walls to the north of the cart shed. However, the plans within the historical assessment seem to indicate that the structures to the north were offset of the north west corner of the building and were not of significant depth, with walls/enclosures to the south east. It does not appear therefore that the former buildings were of the same footprint of the proposal in this instance; furthermore it appears that such buildings were for agricultural uses and would likely have been characteristic of a rural area. The proposal in constructing a

large domestic dwelling with associated parking and access would domesticate and urbanise much of the chalkpit.

17. The chalkpit, being man-made, is clearly not a natural part of the landscape and I agree that it does not have the characteristics of a field. However, it forms part of the attractive nature of the National Park, the landscape of which itself has been clearly altered by man. While the proposal would not be in view from any public areas, and visible only really from within the pit and its entrance, the scheme would still cause harm not only to the existing building, but also to the intrinsic beauty of the pit itself, domesticating the character of the site. National Parks are landscape designations of national importance. The Framework states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, which have the highest status of protection in relation to such matters
18. I note that the appellant is a local resident and business holder and would plan to build the scheme himself. The proposal would lead to economic and social benefits in terms of the construction and residence of the house and would provide a plot for a person willing to build their own home, in line with paragraph 50 of the Framework. However I consider that such benefits would be limited and would not outweigh the harm that I have identified arising from the scheme.
19. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would not provide a suitable site for housing, having regard to the character and appearance of the landscape and natural beauty of the National Park. The proposal would be contrary to the Framework, as well as to policies CP10 and CP11 of the Joint Core Strategy, policy ST3 of the Local Plan and policy GP50 of the South Downs Plan.
20. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Jon Hockley

INSPECTOR