

11. FULL APPLICATION – PROPOSED AGRICULTURAL BUILDING TO SERVE SHEEP ENTERPRISE AT WELLCROFT FARM OLDFIELDS LANE, GRINDON (NP/SM/1116/1156, P7786 , 21/11/2016, 408571/353842/ALN)

APPLICANT: Mr Lee Machin

Site and Surroundings

Wellcroft Farm is situated in open countryside approximately 220m to the south of the edge of Grindon village. The property abuts the eastern side of an unclassified road (Oldfields Farm Lane) that leads south from the village towards an area known as Deepdale. Wellcroft Farm is an agricultural holding which also has its own abattoir, meat processing facility and butchery, following a series of permissions granted since 2010. The building group currently consists of a farmhouse, stone outbuildings and a number of modern portal framed sheds.

Approximately 140m to the south of the main group of buildings at Wellcroft Farm is a further group of buildings known as Mayfurlong, the farmhouse of which is grade II listed. These are mainly in separate ownership but the applicant owns the north-easternmost building in the group, which is in the process of being converted into an open market dwelling following a grant of planning permission in December 2013.

The application site edged red is an area of land is a 500 sqm rectangular shaped area of land located midway between the group of buildings at Wellcroft and the group of buildings at May Furlong. Approximately 140m to the east of the application site and running in a north-south direction is a public right of way known as Fleets Lane.

The site lies outside of the Grindon Conservation Area. A further grade II listed building (Manor Farm) lies directly to the north of Wellcroft Farm.

Proposal

Planning permission is sought for the erection of a new portal framed agricultural building on the application site. The building would measure 36.6m long by 13.7m wide with a height of 3m to the eaves and 4.6m to the ridge. It would be orientated with its ridge running in an east-west direction with doors placed in the south and west elevations. The sides of the building would be constructed in vertical timber boarding above concrete panels and the roof clad in dark blue pre-coated fibre cement sheeting.

A supporting statement submitted with the application explains that the building is required for the housing of store lambs brought in in connection with the abattoir business and also for housing in connection with the applicant's separate flock of breeding ewes. The application details state that the building would be served by an existing secondary access to Wellcroft Farm, which runs directly to the west of the site.

This application was originally brought before the Planning Committee on 10 February 2017. The application was deferred, with a request that officers discuss the proposal with the applicant, with particular regard to:

1. The viability of alternative sites.
2. Options for protecting the gap between the house and farm buildings.
3. Design options for reducing the impact of the proposals on the landscape.
4. Issues relating to the protection of the well and its water supply.

Subsequently officers met with the applicant and his agent at the site on 21 February 2017 to discuss the issues raised. Alternative sites were discussed and further detail provided with regard to the holding registrations and how these might affect the siting options. An amended site closer to the buildings at May Furlong was agreed in principle subject to some supplementary planting along the eastern boundary of the paddock to help screen the building from the public right of way and also, depending on where the access doors to the building would be, some planting along its southern gable to provide a buffer between the new building and the listed barn. It was agreed that a revised application would be submitted on that basis. Since then officers have prompted the agent on three separate occasions to chase progress on the revised application but none has not been forthcoming. On that basis, it is considered that a decision should now be made on the application.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be REFUSED for the following reasons:

- 1. By virtue of its siting and design the building appear as an isolated and intrusive feature in the landscape and would harm the valued character of the area contrary to paragraph 115 of the NPPF, Core Strategy policies GSP and L1, Local Plan policies LC4 and LC13 and advice in the Adopted SPD on Agricultural Developments in the National Park.**
- 2. The building does not make use of the least obtrusive or otherwise damaging location contrary to Development Plan policy LC13.**

Key Issues

1. Whether the proposed building is agriculturally justified.
2. Landscape impact

History

2010: Demolition of brick-built outbuilding and erection of farm building, granted.

October 2010: Extensions and alterations to dwelling house, granted.

April 2011: Erection of lean to adjacent to existing agricultural building, granted.

June 2011: Formation of new vehicular access and driveway, granted.

April 2011: Change of use of redundant outbuilding to form meat cutting room, withdrawn.

October 2011: Erection of agricultural building, granted conditionally.

October 2011: Erection of a lean to in 2 parts. Single bay lean to and single bay end elevation and lean to, granted conditionally.

February 2012: Erection of a stone barn to house meat cutting room and ancillary fridges / work area, granted conditionally.

February 2013: Erection of mono pitched lean-to building to house piggery, granted conditionally.

March 2013: Replacement of a lean to building with a dual pitch steel portal framed abattoir building behind the existing barn, granted conditionally.

May 2013: GDO for the covering of a yard area, accepted conditionally

December 2013: Permission granted to convert barn to open market dwelling at Mayfurlong.

May 2015: Permission granted for a change of use of existing farm building for meat processing.

August 2016: Permission granted for erection of garage, plant room and alterations to domestic curtilage at Mayfurlong

Consultations

Highway Authority – no response

District Council – no response

Parish Council – recommends approval. Queries potential increases in traffic and where rainwater run-off would go.

Representations

One letter of support has been received from a member of the Authority on the basis that there is a legitimate need for the building.

Main Policies

Relevant Core Strategy policies: GSP1, GSP2, GSP3, DS1, L1.

Relevant Local Plan policies: LC4, LC13.

Core Strategy policy GSP3 explains that development must respect, conserve and enhance all valued characteristics of the site and buildings that are subject to the development proposal. Amongst other things particular attention will be paid to: Impact on the character and setting of buildings; scale of development appropriate to the character and appearance of the National Park; siting, landscaping and building materials; design in accordance with the National Park Authority Design Guide; impact on living conditions of communities. Policy L1 states that development must conserve and enhance valued landscape character, as identified in the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan and other valued characteristics.

Saved Local Plan policy LC13 deals specifically with agricultural developments and it is permissive provided they are close to the main group of buildings wherever possible and it relates well to them. It must avoid harm to the areas valued characteristics including local views, making use of the least obtrusive or otherwise damaging location and must not require obtrusive access tracks, roads or services. These need to be designed with particular respect for the landscape and its historic patterns of land use and movement, and any landscape change likely to result from agricultural or forestry practices.

Further advice is given in the Authority's Adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance on Agricultural Developments (SPD). It states that if inadequate information to justify proposals is supplied then applications may be refused. It also advises at paragraph 3.4.5 that it is best to keep new buildings close to existing ones where possible. Isolated buildings in the open landscape are the most difficult to accommodate. Skyline sites or sites prominent from public vantage points should be avoided.

The relationship between the Core Strategy and the National Planning Framework has also been considered and it is concluded that they are consistent because the NPPF recognises the special status of National Parks and promotes sustainable rural development sensitive to the locally distinctive character of its setting.

Assessment

Whether the proposed building is agriculturally justified

Authority's Adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance on Agricultural Developments (SPD) states that if inadequate information to justify proposals is supplied then applications may be refused. The submitted justification statement explains that in 2015, 4000 lambs passed through the abattoir. These lambs are purchased as stores and fattened to finished condition. At present there is no adequate sheep housing at Wellcroft Farm – the existing farm buildings are used for cattle housing and a pig unit. In addition to the sheep that go through the abattoir the applicant also has a flock of approximately 80 breeding ewes (run on a separate holding number based at Mayfurlong) and the statement explains that the housing is also required for lambing these sheep. It is intended that on completion the business will have a separate sheep housing and finishing unit which can be used to house up to 700 lambs at any one time.

During the course of the application officers have requested a plan and details of the existing buildings and their uses so that a proper assessment can be made with regard to the need for another new building, especially in the light of the fact that permission was granted to convert one of the existing livestock buildings at Wellcroft Farm for meat processing in May 2015. This has not been forthcoming.

However, since the committee meeting in February the agent has provided more detail which explains that the breeding sheep which the proposed building would house are located on the Mayfurlong holding (a 'green' holding where some movement of stock is permitted), which although in common ownership is operated completely separately from the 'red' holding at Wellcroft Farm. There can be no movement of stock out of a red holding other than through the abattoir. It has been demonstrated that there is an agricultural justification for a new building associated with May Furlong and that there needs to be a clear separation and buffer between the two holdings. The proposed site would meet these animal welfare requirements, as would the revised location that has been subsequently discussed.

Landscape Impact

The proposed building would be located roughly midway between the group of buildings at Wellcroft and the buildings at Mayfurlong. It would be some 75m to the south of the Wellcroft group and 50m to the north of the dwelling currently being converted at Mayfurlong.

The land where the building would be sited has been levelled by raising ground levels towards the eastern end of the site. It is currently being used for the storage of rubble and farming equipment. There is a belt of immature tree planting along the northern boundary of the site.

Within the Authority's Landscape Strategy the site falls within the Upland Pastures landscape character type in the South West Peak area. This is an upland pastoral landscape with a traditional dispersed pattern of gritstone farmsteads. Trees are scattered along incised cloughs and around dispersed gritstone farmsteads. One of the priorities in this landscape is to manage the dispersed and historic settlement patterns of development.

From Fleets Lane, a public right of way that runs to the east of the site, the land rises to the west and consequently the proposed building would stand up above the skyline. There are some mature trees to the west of the site which would be seen as a backdrop to the building but

nevertheless the building would be a prominent, elevated feature that would appear isolated from other buildings in the vicinity. The field parcel between Fleets Lane and the application site is not within the applicant's ownership so it would not be feasible to provide screen planting in this area.

From Oldfields Farm Lane to the west, whilst there are intervening trees, in the winter months the building would skyline, due to the elevated nature of the site. This would draw the eye and accentuate its physical isolation.

The introduction of a building in this location would blur the physical distinction between the two existing groups of building and thus dilute the distinctive settlement pattern in the area, contrary to the priorities in the Landscape Strategy. The existing planting to the north of the site would not mitigate the impact of the building in views from the east and west. As a result the proposed building would be harmful to the established landscape character of the area contrary to policies GSP3, L1 and LC13.

As stated above, an alternative position to the south of the current site, closer to the buildings at Mayfurlong would be more appropriate in landscape terms as it would relate better to the existing building group, subject to additional soft landscaping to minimise the impact on the setting of the listed building.

In conclusion, the proposals do not make use of the least obtrusive or otherwise damaging location available contrary to Local Plan policy LC13 and it has not been convincingly demonstrated that alternative locations would not be practical or otherwise suitable.

Other Considerations

Amenity

Due to its isolated position the proposal is not considered to affect the amenity of any nearby property in accordance with policies GSP3 and LC4.

Highways and Parking Issues

The NPPF and Local Plan policy LT18 require that development is served by a safe a suitable access. In this case there are two accesses that serve Wellcroft Farm and which could serve the proposed development. The secondary access, which it is stated would serve the current proposals, was approved following planning permission in 2011. Access to the highway is therefore considered to be adequate and it is not considered that the proposals would be likely to have such a significant impact on the local highway network that would justify a refusal on that basis. This conclusion is also reached in the light of the fact that the Highway Authority has raised no objections. There is adequate space for parking and manoeuvring in association with the proposed use within the application site.

Conclusion

On balance, it is considered that an agricultural need has been demonstrated for the building proposed. However, this does not outweigh the fact that by virtue of the isolated siting of the building and its prominence from public vantage points the building would be harmful to the valued character of the area as identified in the Landscape Strategy. It has not been adequately demonstrated that an alternative less harmful site is not available. The proposals would not represent sustainable rural development as supported by paragraph 28 of the Framework, and would harm the valued character and appearance of the area contrary to policies GSP1, GSP3, L1, LC4, and LC13, the Adopted SPD and to paragraph 115 of the Framework.

Human Rights

Any human rights issues have been considered and addressed in the preparation of this report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil