

16.6.2016

Planning Ref W/16/01013/OU - Former Poultry Unit and Land North of Carrant Brook Farm, Ashton Road, Beckford. Proposed demolition of existing intensive poultry unit buildings and other structures and the development of a Care Village comprising (up to) 145 assisted living and close care units (C2 use class); a core building containing domiciliary care provision, reception, treatment room, cafe/dining area, wellness suite, kitchen, administration offices, and other common/shared amenities; together with access, parking and external amenity areas.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board wish to raise the following comments in respect of this application:

Major Development

The applicant has referred to the Cherkley Court Golf Course High Court and Court of Appeal decisions, however these decisions are not directly comparable to this case. In the case of the Cherkley Court proposal *"only a small proportion of the proposed golf course"* was described as being within the AONB with no built structures. Hence Paragraph 116 of the NPPF was not considered relevant as the vast majority of the development was not "in" the AONB.

Although in this case the applicant has described in floorspace terms 3599.87 sqm is in the AONB and 9243.40 sqm is outside the AONB, in terms of site area and landscape change the majority of the development is within the AONB. The new access point to the north, the associated landscaping, allotments, fishing lake with remodeled banks and public open space, new car parking courts and access ways are in the AONB as well as the proposed 3599.87 sqm of new buildings. It would appear that around three quarters of the application site area of 11.90 ha is within the AONB including the majority of the residential accommodation blocks.

In respect of the recent appeal example of 25 dwellings on the edge of the village at nearby Ashton-under-Hill (a larger Parish population than Beckford) in this case the Inspector considered at Paragraph 18 *"the development would constitute major development in the AONB and, even cumulatively, the benefits arising are not sufficient to amount to exceptional circumstances that would outweigh the harm identified."*

The NPPG advises that the decision maker needs to form a decision on whether 116 of the NPPF is relevant. The recommendation from the Board to the Council therefore, is that in this case Para.116 is relevant as the majority of the changes to the landscape from this development are "in" the AONB.

National policy gives the conservation of landscape and scenic beauty in an AONB a particular enhanced status. It requires an application for planning permission for a major development within an AONB to be refused, unless (i) there are exceptional circumstances ("exceptional" in this context connoting rarity); and (ii) it is demonstrated that, despite giving great weight to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty in the AONB, the development is in the public interest. As well as any detrimental effect of the development on the landscape, this national policy requires the planning decision-maker to assess, and take into consideration, the need for the development and the scope for meeting the assessed need in some other way.

Landscape Change

The Cotswolds Conservation Board do note that there are similar facilities as these proposed already within the applicants established site in the AONB at Painswick (albeit a far more modest "retirement village" on the edge of a much larger settlement compared to Beckford). Further to this the scheme does offer a level of enhancement and opportunities to improve biodiversity and remove the existing large poultry operation.

However, there are a number of specific matters of concern in terms of landscape impact (a) The existing farm buildings, although substantial in area, are relatively low lying well contained features in the landscape with few openings and little external lighting. Farm buildings are part of the farmed landscape of the AONB and in terms of the NPPF Annex 2 Glossary agricultural buildings are not classed as previously developed land. In this case, other than the removal of the use, no substantial enhancement will come from the removal of these buildings on the landscape of the AONB. (b) on the other hand this proposal does involve substantial areas of new buildings both in and in the setting of the AONB to a greater height than as existing, new lighting both from window openings and street lighting and other external lighting, car parking

areas, new access ways, a new access from the north etc. The specific concern is therefore, despite certain enhancement measures as proposed, this will result in a new level of development that is more visible from within the AONB and its setting than the current use and buildings. The form of the development outside the settlement boundary in blocks of accommodation would not form a natural extension of the village but would be seen as a major development within and on the edge of the nationally protected AONB and would inevitably harm the dark night skies of the AONB. The Board therefore cannot conclude that the development at this scale would “conserve and enhance” the AONB as required by the CRoW Act 2000.

Conclusions

The Council therefore, in considering this application must engage with the exercise required of them by paragraphs 115-116 of the NPPF, which requires them to assess the need for the development, the scope for developing elsewhere outside their area or meeting the identified need in some other way, and the detrimental effect on the environment and landscape, whilst giving “great weight” to the scenic beauty factor. This proposal is substantial in scale compared to the very modest settlement of Beckford so questions should also be raised as to whether this can be regarded as sustainable development given its location, landscape impacts and given the restrictions that apply to the AONB (Footnote 9 of Paragraph 14 of the NPPF). The Council are also asked to consider, if need can be justified, whether in this case a far more modest retirement village complex, offering far greater enhancements and mitigations and addressing the outstanding concerns the Board has raised, would be more suitable given the local context. The existing retirement village at Painswick for example we understand provides 24 rooms for nursing care and 42 assisted living flats and independent homes.