2022/0532

Mr William Booth

Change of use of agricultural land to allow for caravan storage

Hazelhead Hall Farm, Lee Lane, Millhouse Green, Sheffield, S36 9NN

Planning History

2021/1040 - Change of use of agricultural land to allow for caravan storage – Refused for the following reason:-

The site lies within the Green Belt on the approved Barnsley Local Plan, wherein there is a presumption against inappropriate development, unless it is for one of the purposes set out in paragraphs 149 and 150 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, the proposed caravan storage facility and associated activity within this isolated and prominent location, would be inappropriate development which would appear incongruous and at odds with the open rural nature of the surrounding land. No very special circumstances have been clearly demonstrated which outweigh the significant harm to the Green Belt that the development would cause to the impact on the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt, and the purposes of including land within it, contrary to the NPPF and Local Plan Policy GB1.

Site Description

Hazelhead Hall Farm complex is situated off Lee Lane and Whams Road, Millhouse Green and is set within the open Green Belt countryside. Hazelhead Hall Farm has been subject to a number of previous planning applications and there are a number of different uses on the site, which include an equestrian centre, bistro, offices, historic vehicle storage and repair and separate dwellings. Hazlehead Hall is a Grade II Listed Building.

The site which is the subject of this planning application is set to the south west of the farm complex and is accessed via Wham's Road. The agent states that the land has previously been used for storage of agricultural waste material used for composting and fertiliser. The site is surrounded by a bund which runs along the south and western boundary. Due to the open nature of the surrounding land and that the main A616 Whams Road runs close to the site at an elevated level from Lee Lane, the site is visible from Whams Road.




Armour Rustproofing
Motor vehicle dealer
River Don
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Proposed Development

The application proposes the change of use of agricultural land to allow for the storage of caravans. The number of caravans has been specified on the application form as 70-80. Further planting is proposed to the existing bund areas which run to the south and western boundaries of the site. The site is accessed via an existing field gate from Whams Road which will be reconfigured as part of the proposal and two passing places are proposed.

This is a resubmission application of a previously refused planning application for the same development under ref: 2021/1040. The additional information submitted with this application includes:-

- A supporting covering letter which outlines the demand for such sites and states that another caravan storage site in Wakefield has closed and that other sites currently available are fully occupied
- An email with details of storage demand from scrselfstore@gmail.com
- A newspaper article which details thefts of motorhomes/caravans
- A letter from the applicant with details of Regenerative Farming and the requirement for extra income through diversification

The agent has supplied the following justification in support of the application

'The location of the site is ideal for purpose being visually unobtrusive, secure in access arrangements and capable of electronic surveillance when secured at night time. It provides a much needed facility for caravan owners who cannot normally store caravans in existing or new housing developments. Theft of caravans is endemic and insurance companies are requiring owners to use such sites to avoid criminal activity.

Farmers will have to decide between experimentation or diversification. The applicant is already applying new methods of agriculture and animal management to his land but badly needs income support from well controlled diversification projects to grow his income in the next decades. This project has minimal environmental problems, will increase biodiversity, will be safe in operation, reduce criminal opportunity and support the farm business to the benefit of the Borough.'

Policy Context

Planning decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise and the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. The new Local Plan was adopted at the full Council meeting held 3rd January 2019. In addition, the Council has adopted a series of Supplementary Planning Documents and Neighbourhood Plans which provide supporting guidance and specific local policies and are a material consideration in the decision making process.

The site is located in the Green Belt.

Paragraph 138 states that: Green Belt serves five purposes:

a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Paragraph 149 of the NPPF states:

A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:
a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
e) limited infilling in villages;
f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:– not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or– not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

Paragraph 150 states:- Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

These are:

a. mineral extraction
b. engineering operations;
c. local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;

d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;

e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
f) development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

Local Plan

The following Local Plan policies are of relevance:-

- Policy GD1 General Development
- Policy T4 New development and Transport Safety
- Policy D1 High Quality Design and Place Making
- Policy GB1 Protection of Green Belt
- Policy Poll1 Pollution Control and Protection

NPPF

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. At the heart is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Consultations

Dunford Parish Council – No comments received

Highways – No objections subject to conditions

Pollution Control – No objections to previous application

Ward Councillors – No comments received

Biodiversity Officer – Previous comments 'The LPA's current policy is for No Net Loss and I request the applicants make a small offer of post-construction mitigation.'

Tree Officer – No comments received

Yorkshire Water – No comments received

Drainage – No comments received

Representations

No comments received

Assessment

Principle of development

The site is located within the Green Belt as allocated within the Local Plan. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The use of land for the storage of caravans is 'inappropriate development' within the Green Belt and is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Para 148 of the NPPF states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The agent considers that the proposal is justified due to security reasons and the site providing 'a much needed facility for caravan owners who cannot normally store caravans in existing or new housing developments. Theft of caravans is endemic and insurance companies are requiring owners to use such sites to avoid criminal activity.' In addition, the agent states that the proposal is required as a diversification project as the applicant is 'already applying new methods of agriculture and animal management to his land but badly needs income support from well controlled diversification projects to grow his income in the next decades. This project has minimal environmental problems, will increase biodiversity, will be safe in operation, reduce criminal opportunity and support the farm business to the benefit of the Borough.' The agent has also supplied a letter of justification from the applicant which provides details of regenerative farming.

The agent considers that the diversification of the farm also provides justification. Hazelhead Hall Farm itself currently has a number of diversification projects, which include an equestrian centre, vehicle repairs and offices which would provide a number of income streams for the applicant. Supporting financial accounts/information have not been submitted with the application, therefore it is felt that insufficient evidence has been submitted for this aspect and therefore does not provide very special circumstances.

The agent has provided a newspaper article which details that there has been an increase of thefts of motorhomes/caravans over recent times. The agent considers that a facility of this nature is required as a secure site for the storage of caravans and that the site will be provided with electronic surveillance in the form of CCTV. The site is set in an isolated location and not adjacent to the existing complex of farm buildings at Hazelhead Hall Farm. The proposal would result in an isolated caravan storage facility, with no on site security or natural surveillance, which would in itself raise security concerns and concerns with regard to potential future developments, such as potential on site security cabins or accommodation.

In terms of justification for the requirement for the facility, the agent has submitted additional information in the form of a supporting covering letter which outlines the demand for caravan storage sites. The supporting letter from the agent states that a caravan storage site in Wakefield has closed which has increased demand, and that other sites currently available are fully occupied. An email has also been submitted with details of storage demand from scrselfstore@gmail.com, however no details of this company, their location, or their current storage/capacity have been provided. Furthermore, no details of the 'Wakefield site', which is now closed, have been provided such as its location and number of caravans previously stored at the site. The agent has therefore not submitted sufficient supporting evidence to show that there is a requirement for a caravan storage facility within this rural area, and why there are no suitable locations for caravan storage areas within the surrounding built up urban areas.

An analysis of other caravan storage sites within the area shows that there is a similar facility which is located within 700m of the application site at Ranah Stones Farm. The agent has mentioned this site within the supporting letter and states that the site will be operated in a similar manner, however no details have been provided in terms of the current occupation rate of this site. This site was approved in 2015 under application ref 2015/1020. Whilst the site is also set within the Green Belt, it is not felt that the sites have the same justification/ very special circumstances, and the Ranah Stones site does not set a precedent for further sites within the Green Belt. The Ranah Stones Farm storage facility was approved due to very special

circumstances and the importance of Ranah Stone Farm as a habitat and 'core' site for breeding Lapwing within the Dark Peak region. It was considered that the supplementary income the caravan facility generated allowed for less intensive farming activity to take place at the site and evidence was submitted with the application which included financial figures alongside evidence submitted by the Countryside and Economy Advisor from the Peak District National Park Authority. The proposal was justified, and very special circumstances demonstrated.

In this instance and in the absence of justification, the proposed caravan storage facility at Hazelhead Hall Farm would cause significant harm to the openness of the Green Belt by way of its visual impact and activity within the Green Belt and there are no very special circumstances which would allow a relaxation of Green Belt policy in this instance, contrary to paragraphs 148 and 150 of the NPPF and policy GB1 of the Local Plan.

Visual Amenity

The storage of caravans within the Green Belt will have a degree of impact upon openness and the impact upon visual amenity is an important consideration. The site which is the subject of this planning application is set to the south west of the Hazelhead Farm complex within open countryside and is accessed via Wham's Road. The site is currently surrounded by a bund which runs along the south and western boundary which provides some low level screening, however the site is still visible from surrounding areas. The agent has stated on the application form that there would be approximately 70-80 caravans proposed to be stored at the site and the additional activity at the site and coming and going of approximately 70-80 caravans and associated vehicles will have a significant impact upon the Green Belt and its openness.

Due to the open nature of the surrounding land and that the main A616 Whams Road runs close to the site and at an elevated level from Lee Lane, the site is visible from Whams Road. Whilst the agent has proposed planting along the boundaries, any planting would take time to establish, and the caravans would be visible and will be prominent from surrounding areas. Caravan storage within the Green Belt and the number of caravans that could potentially be stored at the site (70-80) would appear incongruous and at odds with the rural character of the landscape. The site is also set in isolation and is not set adjacent to the complex of farm buildings which would result in an isolated development that would appear prominent and would have a significant impact upon the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt, contrary to policy GB1 of the Local Plan.

Highway Safety

The entrance to the site is to be taken from Whams Road and amended plans have been submitted which show that the entrance will be reconfigured to allow a car and caravan to move immediately off Whams Road before entering the site access gate. The Highways Officer has no objection to the proposal and passing places have been included on a plan which has been approved by the Highways Officer. The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of Highway Safety, in accordance with policy T4 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity

An Ecology report was submitted with the previous application which indicated that there are no protected species that will be impacted by the proposal. The report offers mitigation measures which would need to be followed. In terms of mitigation for the small losses of biodiversity that the development would cause, the current policy is for No Net Loss and the Biodiversity Officer requested that the applicants make a small offer of post-construction mitigation. The agent stated with the previous application that screening trees will be planted

around the bunds, particularly to areas facing Whams Road to support birdlife, which would allow for mitigation and no net loss. This is considered to be acceptable in accordance with policy BIO1 of the Local Plan.

Conclusion

The site lies within the Green Belt on the approved Barnsley Local Plan, wherein there is a presumption against inappropriate development, unless it is for one of the purposes set out in paragraphs 149 and 150 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, the proposed caravan storage facility and associated activity within this isolated and prominent location, would be inappropriate development which would appear incongruous and at odds with the open rural nature of the surrounding land. No very special circumstances have been clearly demonstrated which outweigh the significant harm to the Green Belt that the development would cause to the impact on the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt, and the purposes of including land within it, contrary to the NPPF and Local Plan Policy GB1.

Recommendation

Refuse