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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 January 2018

**by Mike Worden BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 16<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/H1033/W/17/3187785**

**Field adjacent to Westfield House Farm Campsite, High Hill Road,  
Thornsett, Birch Vale, High Peak, Derbyshire SK22 1BA**

- 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 Mrs Janice Pool against the decision of High Peak Borough Council.
  - The application Ref HPK/2017/0030, dated 17 January 2017, was refused by notice dated 8 September 2017.
  - The development proposed is change of use to create six touring caravan storage spaces in existing field.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
  - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
  - the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt and the character and distinctiveness of the area; and,
  - if the development is inappropriate and/or causes any other harm, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

### Reasons

#### *Inappropriate development*

3. The appeal site is located within the North Derbyshire Green Belt. Paragraphs 89 and 90 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) set out exceptions to new development in the Green Belt being inappropriate. The change of use of land to store caravans is not one of those exceptions. Consequently the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
4. The Framework advises that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be permitted except in very special

circumstances. Policy EQ4 of the *High Peak Local Plan* (the Local Plan), seeks to protect the Green Belt and maintain its openness. In accordance with the policy, national planning policy will apply to proposals for new development.

*Openness and character*

5. The appeal site is part of a grazing field next to a camping and caravanning site outside of New Mills. The wider site is flat and lies next to the River Sett. To the west beyond the river and the trees along its banks, is Batemill Road. On the eastern side of the appeal site there is a farm house, Westfield House and a stable. These properties are on High Hill Road which is at a higher level than the appeal site. To the south of the appeal site there is a row of trees and then open pasture land.
6. Hills form part of the wider landscape rising from behind Batemill Road and to the north east above Thornsett. The character of the area is rural with stone houses and farm buildings scattered along roads and dotted on the hill sides behind. The appeal site is in the valley bottom and is part of a green landscape.
7. The proposed development is to change the use of a small part of the grazing field to enable the storage of up to six touring caravans. The caravans would be stored together, side by side. The caravans would be located where there is no built development currently. When present, their collective mass, even when not all six would be there, would inevitably lead to a significant loss of openness, both visually and spatially. Paragraph 79 of the Framework advises that openness is an essential characteristic of Green Belts.
8. The caravans would be highly visible in the landscape particularly given their white and reflective nature. The caravans would contrast significantly with the greenness of the grazing land next to the site and the trees which border it. The caravans would be visible within the landscape from Batemill Road particularly in the winter months, from High Hill Road and from the hills above. The rural character would be eroded. The appellant intends to plant a belt of trees to screen the caravans from the west and to strengthen the existing tree line to the south. Additional planting could also be undertaken. However, this would take time to grow and although I have little information about its nature or extent, I consider that the proposed planting would not be sufficient to avoid significant harm to the character and distinctiveness of the area.
9. During the season the existing adjacent caravanning and camping field would accommodate a number of touring caravans. However, I understand it to be a lawful use that is unaffected by this decision. Moreover, those caravans would be likely to be scattered across the field and numbers and locations within it may change, whereas the proposed development would have an all year round impact. I consider that the presence of touring caravans on the adjacent field would not reduce the significant harm to the character and distinctiveness of the area which I have found in relation to this proposal.
10. In coming to this view, I accept that at times the caravans will be taken from the site. However, it is reasonable to assume that each caravan will be on the site for most of the year and at any one time a number of caravans will be present. The fact that individual caravans will therefore be removed does not lead me to different findings.

11. For the reasons set out above I conclude that the proposed development would cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt. It would also cause significant harm to the character and distinctiveness of the area contrary to Policy EQ3 and EQ2 of the Local Plan. Policy EQ3 of the Local Plan seeks to control rural development to protect the intrinsic character and distinctiveness of the landscape. Policy EQ2 seeks to protect, enhance and restore the landscape character of the area. I also consider that the proposed development would be contrary to paragraph 109 of the Framework, which amongst other things, seeks the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes.
12. Policy E7 of the Local Plan sets out criteria for development proposals involving chalet accommodation, caravan and camp sites. I consider that this policy is not directly relevant to the proposed development which is for caravan storage.

#### *Other considerations*

13. The Framework states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, and that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. It adds that very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
14. The storage of caravans would provide valuable income to the appellant particularly given that the caravanning and camping operation is seasonal. This income would contribute to the upkeep of the site and assist the viability of the appellant's agricultural business. The storage may also help the caravanning operation by enabling regular visitors to store their caravans on site, indirectly benefitting the local economy as spending in local services may be increased as a result of more visits.
15. I give moderate weight to these benefits of the proposed development as I can recognise that additional income, particularly out of season, would assist a small rural operation such as this.

#### **Conclusion**

16. I have found that the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which by definition is harmful to the Green Belt. There would also be harm to the openness of the Green Belt. The Framework indicates that substantial weight should be given to such harm. As a result of this harm to the Green Belt the proposed development would be contrary to Policy EQ4 of the Local Plan. The proposed development would also result in significant harm to the character and distinctiveness of the area.
17. I have attached moderate weight to the benefits which the proposed development would bring to the operation and to the local economy. However, I conclude that they do not outweigh the significant harm which the proposal would cause, and do not amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.
18. For the reasons set out above, and having considered all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

*Mike Worden*

INSPECTOR