



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 February 2022

by M Cryan BA(Hons) DipTP MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 May 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/W/21/3283845

Angram Green Cottage, West Lane, Worston, Clitheroe BB7 1QB

- 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 John Haworth against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 3/2021/0621, dated 10 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 11 August 2021.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of existing agricultural barn to a bunk barn with parking, access and storage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. As is usual, I have used the description of development from the planning application form in the banner heading above. I have however omitted a reference to it being a resubmission of an earlier application, as that is not descriptive of the proposal.
3. A third party representation pointed out a discrepancy in the "blue line" ownership plan submitted with the planning application. Although this was acknowledged as an error by the appellant, it has had no significant bearing on either the proposal or my decision.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposed bunk barn would be compatible with existing surrounding uses, with particular regard to the effects of increased recreational activity, vehicle movements, noise and other potential disturbance on amenity.

Reasons

5. Angram Green lies in open countryside on the south side of West Lane, half a mile or so east of the small village of Worston. There are two residential properties within Angram Green; Angram Green Cottage (owned by the appellant) and Angram Green Farmhouse (which is in separate ownership), as well as various outbuildings, accessed by a track from West Lane. The appellant also owns three holiday cottages on the west side of the access track and uses part of the site as an established camping and caravan site.

6. The barn which is the principal focus of this appeal forms part of a larger building, only the northern part of which is in the appellant's ownership. The larger southern part of the barn is in the ownership of Angram Green Farmhouse, as is the land immediately abutting the north and west sides of the appellant's part of the building. Angram Green Farmhouse itself is directly east of the barn, a very short distance away across the access track. The appeal "red line" site boundary encompasses the track from West Lane, the appellant's part of the barn building, a small "forecourt" area in front of the barn, and a branch of the track to the east leading towards Angram Green Cottage.
7. The proposed development is the conversion of the barn to create a bunk or camping barn, providing accommodation for up to around a dozen people. It would primarily, though not exclusively, be aimed at organised groups such as schools, Scouts and youth groups, taking part in walking and other outdoor activities in the area. There would be kitchen and bathroom facilities on the ground floor, along with the "camping barn" area; the "bunk barn" part would be on the first floor.
8. There would also be an internal area within the existing building envelope providing a parking area for two cars, and a small semi-covered amenity space at the rear (western side) of the building. A separate office and store for the appellant's business would be created at the front of the building. Additional car parking for those staying at the barn would be available at the end of the eastern leg of the access track, next to Angram Green Cottage. The proposed development would provide a basic level of self-contained accommodation, which the appellant considers would be most likely to be used for short-term stays, mainly during the summer months.
9. The proposed scheme originally included a "drop off" area for visitors arriving in vehicles, which would have been immediately in front of the barn. That was removed from the proposal before the Council determined the planning application, and the appellant now states that any cars would pull into the space within the barn, while overnight parking would be at the separate area, down the eastern branch of the access track, next to Angram Green Cottage.
10. To my mind this proposed arrangement is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it is based on the assumption that visitors would drive their vehicles into the barn rather than park and unload on the track outside, which in itself seems unlikely, regardless of the appellant's intention in this respect. Secondly, many groups would be of such a size that several cars, a larger vehicle such as a minibus, or (perhaps most realistically) a combination of these would be used for transport. Thirdly, even assuming that visitors were quite willing to use the more distant parking area it is likely that, particularly in inclement weather, they would wish to unload kit at the barn first. The combination of these factors means that there would be very likely to be some vehicular congestion, along with considerable noise from voices, doors opening and closing, and vehicles being manoeuvred in a relatively confined space. While this would mainly be limited to arrival and departure periods, it would nevertheless be disruptive for the occupiers of Angram Green Farmhouse.
11. The proposed "amenity area" at the rear of the building would provide a semi-covered space for visitors to use. However, it would be small, and would be hemmed in not only by the western wall of the bunk barn, but by the surrounding shed-like part of the barn structure belonging to Angram Green

Farmhouse. The small size and its siting next to the agricultural shed means that in my view it would be unlikely to present an attractive space for any sustained outdoor gathering. While it might serve visitors seeking just a few moments outside (perhaps members of adult groups popping out for a smoke or similar) it would not meet the requirements of a full group of outdoor enthusiasts wishing to spend a summer evening socialising.

12. The appellant suggests that socialising could instead take place at a communal area further along the track to the north. However, this would be a couple of minutes walking time from the barn and, while it would perhaps draw visitors some of the time it would not be a realistic option for (say) outdoor eating if a meal had been prepared in the bunk barn. While I note that the appellant says that no seating area would be provided in front of the barn, nevertheless it seems likely to me that it would still be a more appealing location for socialising than the proposed amenity space. In my view groups of visitors would be likely to wish to gather informally at the front of the barn; even if they took pains to be as careful and considerate as possible, given the close relationship with Angram Green Farmhouse, there would realistically be likely to be some harmful noise disturbance.
13. The existing barn is a stone building, although the rear south-western part (in the ownership of Angram Green Farmhouse) is a less substantial sheeting-clad structure. The appellant has stated that the "other half" of the barn is used for storage only, and that its use therefore would not "have any impact on noise travelling between the walls". The use of the Angram Green Farmhouse part of the barn is disputed by its owner, who has stated that the barn is used for a variety of agricultural purposes. While I was not able to see inside the other part of the barn at the time of my site visit, it was clearly in use for purposes which included, at least intermittently, the operation of noisy equipment and machinery. Such loud noise would cause harmful disturbance to visitors within the proposed bunk barn and its amenity space.
14. I am not persuaded that a suitable condition could be put in place which would effectively control vehicle parking and drop off such that it would not result in disturbance. While the appellant also suggested that a condition could be put in place requiring the installation of sound insulation in the bunk barn, while that could limit the direct transmission of noise between the two parts of the barn it would not prevent harmful noise disturbance to the rear amenity area, limiting its usefulness and increasing the likelihood of visitors gathering elsewhere on the site.
15. The appellant has also suggested that the of the appeal property for agricultural purposes could be resumed, and that this would have a greater impact on the occupiers of Angram Green Farmhouse in terms of noise, smells and other disturbance than its proposed use as a bunkhouse. However, such a use would be in keeping both with the historic use of the appeal site, and the current use of the other part of the building outside the appellant's ownership. While this is therefore a legitimate fallback position for the appellant, it would be unlikely to be more intrusive to neighbours, and so carries very limited weight in favour of the current proposed development.
16. I note that the Council considered that the use of the building as a bunk barn would be acceptable in principle, subject to other relevant considerations. None of the evidence before me, or my observations on site, leads me to a different

view. However, for the reasons I have set out above, I consider that the proposal before me would result in unacceptable noise disturbance arising from the loading, unloading and movement of vehicles, and from the gathering of visitors, which would be harmful to living conditions for the occupiers of Angram Green Farmhouse. The existing use of the attached part of the barn for agricultural purposes would also lead to noise disturbance for occupiers of the proposed bunk barn.

17. I therefore conclude that the proposed bunk barn would not be compatible with the existing surrounding uses. Consequently, the proposed development conflicts with Policies DMG1 and DMB3 of the 2014 Ribble Valley Core Strategy. Among other things, while these policies are supportive of recreation and tourism proposals, they require development to be well-related to and compatible with existing uses, including in terms of amenity.

Other Matters

18. The appeal site is within the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty ("the AONB"). Paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework emphasises that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of AONBs; this is also reflected in the Council's development plan policies. The Council considered that the proposed alterations to the barn which were proposed would be acceptable, subject to the control of materials and design details. I agree that the proposal would not cause harm to the character and appearance of the area, and the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB would be conserved. However, that the proposal would be acceptable in this respect is a neutral factor which does not outweigh the other harm I have found.

Conclusion

19. The proposal conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no material considerations, including the Framework, which indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. For the reasons given above, the appeal is therefore dismissed.

M Cryan

Inspector