



Adroddiad

Ymweliad â safle a wnaed ar 06/03/06

Report

Site visit made on 06/03/06

gan/by Clive I Cochrane DipArch MSc MRTPI

Arolygydd penodwyd gan Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol Cymru

an Inspector appointed by the National
Assembly for Wales

Dyddiad/Date 24-03-2006

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

SECTION 77 CALL-IN

Ceredigion County Council

Planning Application made by

Mr Alun Lloyd

Cyf ffeil/File Ref: APP/D6820/X/05/514759

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Site address: Land at Waunbant, Lledrod, Ceredigion SY23 4HX

- The application was called in for decision by the Welsh Assembly Government by a direction made under section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 on 05/12/05.
- The application is made by Mr Alun Lloyd to Ceredigion County Council.
- The application Ref: A05-1087 is dated 10/10/05.
- The development proposed is the erection of a dwelling and formation of a new access to the highway.
- The reason given for making the direction is that the proposed development raises planning issues of more than local importance, which may conflict with national planning policy.
- On the information available at the time of making the direction, the following were the matters on which the Assembly Government particularly wished to be informed for the purpose of its-consideration of the application:
 - 1) The visual and environmental implications of the proposed development on the site and surrounding area.
 - 2) The relevant national policies as set out in Planning Policy Wales (March 2002), particularly those relating to residential development in the open countryside and Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6 – Agriculture and Rural Development.
 - 3) Policies in the Dyfed Structure Plan, Ceredigion Local Plan and Ceredigion Unitary Development Plan.

Summary of Recommendation: that the proposed development be refused planning permission.

Procedural Matters

1. At the arranged accompanied site visit, the Council's representative failed to appear at the appointed time and I was met by the applicant's father, Mr R A Lloyd, and his agent, Mr B W Jenkins. After waiting for approximately 30 minutes, the agent telephoned the Council and it was agreed that I should carry out an unaccompanied inspection of the site and surroundings.

The Site and Surroundings

2. The application site is an unenclosed corner of an open field in agricultural use. It is situated in the open countryside approximately 2.5km south-east of the village of Lledrod. This large, level field lies between Waunbant, a farm holding, and the County road between Lledrod and Ystrad Meurig. The site would be formed on the east side of the junction of the farm access road and the public highway, separated from the access road by an avenue of tall beech trees. Apart from these trees and the banked ditch and fence along the roadside, the site is open with extensive views of the undulating, partly wooded countryside.

Planning Policy

3. The site lies in the open countryside where Policy H8 of the Dyfed Structure Plan presumes against new residential development in the countryside unless required to house a worker in agriculture, forestry or other appropriate employment who must live on the spot rather than in a nearby settlement. Policy E11 of the Ceredigion Local Plan Deposit Version (as amended) restates this policy and Policy E10 states that where they are allowed, new agricultural worker's dwellings should be located within or immediately adjoining existing farm complexes, unless there are overriding operational reasons why the building should be located elsewhere.

4. Housing Policy H2.2 of the emerging Ceredigion Unitary Development Plan deals with rural areas exceptions policy, and states that “in exceptional circumstances the provision of housing to meet affordable housing needs may be considered on sites adjoining existing settlements provided:
 - 1) no alternative feasible or suitable premises or sites exist within the settlement;
 - 2) there is adequate evidence of need to require the provision of affordable housing within the settlement;
 - 3) that the development is of a scale and design that is appropriate to the locality and that there are no unacceptable adverse impacts on the environment, amenity or highway issues;
 - 4) the proposed development is adjacent to and forms a logical extension of the settlement boundary, or where the proposed development relates to a cluster or group of dwellings that do not have a settlement boundary it adjoins the existing built form.”

5. UDP Policy H2.4 also restricts new dwellings in the open countryside to those needed to house workers employed in agriculture, forestry or other appropriate employment in the rural economy. “The development should be essential for the operational requirements of the activity and there must be a need for the workers to live on the spot rather than in a nearby settlement. Where the need for a new dwelling is established in accordance with the requirements set out in TAN (W)6 (Para 41-46), the dwelling should: -
 - 1) be located within or adjacent to the use that it intends to serve, e.g. the existing farm complex and should seek to re-use existing buildings prior to new build;
 - 2) be of a scale and design appropriate to the character of the location; and
 - 3) be kept available for this need.”

The Case for the Applicant

6. The applicant is herd manager at IGER (Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research), responsible for a dairy herd of 350 cows. The work involves working unsocial hours, starting at 5.30am and he has to be available at all times of the day or night to tend cows, including calving and health problems. This requires the applicant to live within minutes of the farm and the proposed site would be 2 miles away from the place of work. The applicant’s current accommodation is about half a mile from his work.

7. The applicant’s parents’ house is considered to be overcrowded as there are 3 brothers in the family. The Welsh Assembly’s Homebuy Scheme limit of £90,000 would not be adequate for the applicant to buy a property in the area. The best solution is to build on land bought from his grandparents for a much reduced sum as plots in the village range between £70,000 and £100,000 just to buy the land. It is also discouraging to young people that single plots within the settlement boundaries of Lledrod, Llanafan and Llanilar are not readily available as land is bought up by developers.

8. The application is for an agricultural worker’s dwelling adjacent to Waunbant Farm, which is a small holding. The rural areas have problems with loss of jobs, closure of primary schools, housing costs and the threat facing the Welsh language. The development plan policies have caused greater hardship by restricting small villages to low housing growth, which has the effect of increasing land values in some areas.

9. Young people have even fewer opportunities to purchase land on which to build their homes. This forces people to move away from the area where they were brought up. Today, young

people find it harder to get started with building a home without the opportunity to develop land within the family farm.

The Case for the Council

10. In not following the recommendation of their officers to refuse the application, the Council Members took the view that the applicant works in agriculture close by the site; he is a valued member of the local community, being in the Ceredigion Young Farmers Club and the local rugby team; the development would support the Welsh language; and the applicant helps on his grandparents family farm, which would help to retain it as a family farm. Consequently, the Council was minded to approve the development and grant planning permission.

Written Representations

11. The local AM, Miss Elin Jones, supports the application as being for an agricultural dwelling rather than a general needs dwelling, which is how it appears to have been considered by the Council. She considers that the proposal meets the functional test outlined in TAN 6 because the applicant is a full-time agricultural worker on a stable agricultural unit and is required by his employer to be on hand day and night in order to care for the dairy herd. Also, his salary is not sufficient to allow him to purchase a house or plot in the Aberystwyth area due to the hugely inflated house prices. It is recognised that the proposal is not linked to a traditional family holding and does not meet the financial test in TAN 6, but it is clear that the IGER farm demonstrates long-term financial security through full-time employment in farming. As the dwelling would be subject to an agricultural occupancy condition, if allowed, it would be reserved for use by the agricultural community and it would avoid any abuse of planning policy in the open countryside.
12. The President of the Ceredigion YFC, Hugh Tudor, writes in support of the application on the grounds that the family is an important part of the local community, having lived and worked Waunbant for the past 4 generations. It is imperative that young people like the applicant should be allowed the chance to stay in farming within the community.
13. IGER confirm that the applicant is employed as Dairy Herd Manager. His duties require him to live close to his work for the inspection of livestock etc. Although the Institute can provide houses for staff, most prefer to live in their own accommodation, but they are encouraged to locate close to their workplace.
14. Councillor Dai Lloyd Evans, Leader of the County Council and the Ward Councillor, also supports the application on grounds that young people should be encouraged to stay in the community, and that losing young people in the rural community has contributed to the reduction in the percentage of Welsh speakers in the last 8-10 years from around 60% to just over 40% in the area. It is considered essential for both the social and economic well-being of these communities in future that such people be assisted to find suitable and affordable housing. In addition to these points, the local Vicar, Revd H Alan Chiplin, is concerned about the area becoming a population of elderly people, with falling primary school rolls leading to closures, and the need for the applicant to continue looking after the grandfather's holding of Waunbant in the future.
15. All of the above points are re-stated by M E Morgan, Headteacher of Lledrod Community Primary School, and R L Griffith, County Executive Officer of the Farmers' Union of Wales. The Clerk for Lledrod Community Council, Mr Dewi Morris Jones, supports the application for demographic reasons, as in an area of low income it is impossible for young people to buy

a house locally. Even modest properties in the area require an outlay of at least £150,000, which is considerably beyond the means of those earning up to £20,000 p.a. Therefore, building on family-owned land through a self-build project enables young local people to become established, thus rejuvenating and stabilising the local community.

Appraisal

16. The proposed development would occupy a small part of an agricultural field in a fairly remote location set within the open countryside. The site is prominently located on the road frontage between Lledrod and Ystrad Meurig and the proposed development would be set against a backdrop of attractive scenery where there are extensive views of an unspoilt rural landscape, including vistas of the southern ranges of the Cambrian Mountains across open fields.
17. National policy regarding new housebuilding in the open countryside is set out in paragraph 9.3.6 of Planning Policy Wales. This aims to strictly control such development, stating that “Isolated new houses in the open countryside require special justification, for example, where they are essential to enable farm or forestry workers to live at or close to their place of work in the absence of nearby accommodation”. The functional and financial tests to justify the need for such accommodation are set out in the following paragraphs 9.3.7-9.3.8 of PPW for both new and existing farming enterprises.
18. TAN 6 advises that new residential accommodation in isolated areas may be justified to enable agricultural or forestry workers to live at or close to their place of work, provided that there is genuine need for the farm or forestry enterprise, the proposed dwelling is of a size that is commensurate with that requirement, it will be kept available for that need and a suitable occupancy condition can be imposed.
19. Whilst the applicant is in full-time agricultural employment with IGER, this is not functionally related to the application site at his grandparents’ farm, Waunbant. The proposed dwelling would be located about 2 miles away from the applicant’s place of work at IGER. In fact, he states that he currently lives closer to his place of work than the proposed location at Waunbant. Both national and local planning policy is that an exception to the strict control over new residential development in the open countryside would be where the accommodation is required for a worker to live at or close to their place of work.
20. There is no evidence that it is necessary for the applicant to live on the spot at Waunbant and the proposed dwelling would not be close enough to serve the immediate needs of the farming activity at IGER. Accordingly, the proposal does not satisfy the locational and functional requirements for a new agricultural dwelling in the countryside.
21. From the evidence it appears that a primary purpose of the proposed dwelling would be to provide an affordable home for the applicant. However, the proposal would not comply with Policy H2.2 as the site does not adjoin an existing settlement or relate to a cluster or group of dwellings, so as to form an addition to the existing built form. It would be separate from the village and the farm buildings and therefore visually intrusive into the rural landscape. The development would not involve the re-use of existing buildings or a location close to the existing farm group of Waunbant, and it therefore does not meet the policy requirements to safeguard the openness of the rural area.
22. This single plot in the open countryside would not meet the criteria set out in the development plan for affordable housing. The proposed dwelling would appear isolated on

the County road through this attractive area, and as such it would be harmful to the countryside.

Conditions

23. The applicant offers to restrict the occupancy of the proposed dwelling to that of an agricultural worker and his family. Whilst this would be an appropriate and necessary condition if it was decided by the Assembly that the proposed development is justified as an essential agricultural dwelling under the rural settlement policies, in my view it would not render the development acceptable in itself.

Conclusions

24. It is not disputed that the application site lies in the open countryside where both government and development plan policy would rule out new residential development unless there are exceptional circumstances. Although the applicant is a full-time agricultural worker, the proposed development would not be sited at or near the applicant's normal place of work. Whilst I can empathise with the applicant's wish to be located on his grandparents' farm for both economic and family reasons, as he may take over the holding in the future, the current proposal does not meet the functional or financial tests for essential agricultural dwellings set out in PPW and TAN 6.
25. If allowed to proceed, the erection of a single dwelling on this prominent site would appear as a sporadic and isolated dwelling in the attractive rural landscape of Ceredigion. As it would not be visually related to any existing settlement or group of buildings, it would cause significant harm to the character of the open countryside.
26. For the above reasons, I recommend that planning permission should be refused for the development.

C. I. Courane .

INSPECTOR