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## Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 18 September 2018

by **Andrew McGlone BSc MCD MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 September 2018

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### **Appeal A Ref: APP/U2370/W/18/3202697**

#### **Big Blindhurst Farm, Bleasdale Lane, Bleasdale PR3 1UT**

- 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 Michael Kelsall against the decision of Wyre Borough Council.
  - The application Ref 17/00638/FUL, dated 29 June 2017, was refused by notice dated 14 December 2017.
  - The development proposed is building for storage of silage phase 1 of a 2 phase plan.
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### **Appeal B Ref: APP/U2370/W/18/3202699**

#### **Big Blindhurst Farm, Bleasdale Lane, Bleasdale PR3 1UT**

- 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 Michael Kelsall against the decision of Wyre Borough Council.
  - The application Ref 17/00639/FUL, dated 29 June 2017, was refused by notice dated 14 December 2017.
  - The development proposed is building for storage of silage phase 2 of a 2 phase plan.
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### **Decisions**

1. Appeal A is dismissed.
2. Appeal B is dismissed.

### **Preliminary Matters**

3. Although the scale, design and the proposed use of materials are the same for each proposed building, the respective appeal sites are immediately next to each other.
4. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been submitted by the appellant as part of their appeal documentation. This was not before the Council when they refused planning permission for the applications that are subject of the appeals. While representations have been received, and the appeal process should not be used to evolve a scheme, given that no substantive changes are proposed to the appeal schemes, and the Council have submitted evidence in response to the LVIA, I have considered the appeals having regard to the LVIA.

### **Main Issues**

5. The main issue in respect of Appeals A and B is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

## Reasons

6. Big Blindhurst Farm comprises of a cluster of gritstone farm buildings which are next to a separate cluster of farm buildings at Little Blindhurst Farm. Both farmsteads are accessed off a long access track from Bleasdale Lane. Due to the siting of the farm on the slopes of Parlick Hill which rises to the north, the access, which also serves as a public right of way (PROW), gradually rises from the lane towards the farm. The PROW passes through the farm and joins a wider PROW network which crosses the undulating landscape which the appeal site forms part of. The appeal site also forms part of the countryside.
7. The development proposed in Appeals A and B would be sited to the south of the farm buildings and where an earth banked silage store is. I understand this is the reason for the siting of the proposed buildings. The existing store is in-between the access (and PROW) and another access which extends from the cluster of farm buildings. Ground levels on the appeal sites are lower than those where the farm buildings are located.
8. Saved Policy SP13 of the Wyre Borough Local Plan 1991 – 2006 Written Statement (LP) states that development in an area designated as the countryside will not be permitted except for the essential requirements of agriculture. I understand that the farm has in recent years expanded with new livestock buildings, and that the proposals seek planning permission to erect a building to store silage to feed the dairy herd. By covering the silage clamp there is likely to be a reduction in dirty water runoff in this sensitive location, and improvements to the herd's health and performance by being able to store sufficient silage for the herd. I have no reason to dispute the parties' joint position that there is an essential need for the proposed buildings.
9. Nevertheless, the purpose of the AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, whilst having regard to the social and economic needs of the landowners, farmers and communities. Paragraph 172 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) explains that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONB, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.
10. Saved LP Policy SP14 seeks high standards of design and amenity for all types of development. Where development proposals generally accord with the principles of the development strategy and with other relevant policies and proposals of the plan other criteria will also need to be satisfied: the development should be acceptable in the local landscape in terms of its scale, mass, style, siting and use of materials.
11. The Council consider that the appeal schemes jointly equate to 'major development'. This is, however, a question for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined (Footnote 55, the Framework). I shall return to this once I have considered the proposals effect on the AONB.

12. Over one third of the AONB is open moorland, making up the wild open spaces and remoteness that are characteristic of the Forest of Bowland; a truly unique quality of the area and core to the AONB's identity. The appeal sites are within an area of Moorland Fringe as characterised by the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). The transitional rolling enclosed landscape of the Moorland Fringe skirts the edges of the Moorland Hills, usually at an elevation of more than 200m, and links the upland to the lowland landscape. The Moorland Fringe is still largely gritstone and farmsteads are isolated, often strung along a track following a contour of the hill. There is an increasing impact of human activity here, with more dry stone walls, improved pastures, scattered farmsteads and stone out-barns. Consistent with the LCA, the appeal sites allow for dramatic open views from the flank of Parlick towards the villages and valleys of the lowlands. The appeal sites are also equally elevated and visible in the wider landscape. The AONB is still an important agricultural production area.
13. Buildings which make up the farmsteads of Big and Little Blindhurst are closely related to one another. The proposed buildings would be to the south of them, but their siting would be relatively close by, and thus within the broad confines of the farmstead. However, except for reasonably low-lying vegetation along field boundaries or isolated trees, the land on which the buildings would be sited is open. This is characteristic of much of the land around the farm.
14. Each building would have an eaves height of around 9 metres, a ridge height of about 11.4 metres, be some 36.5 metres in length and about 18.2 metres in depth. I note the proposed height of each building is to allow room for the silage to be tipped, stored, managed and compressed using machinery, with a view to the herd being fed according to their nutritional requirements.
15. Despite this, the proposed buildings would individually and collectively be of a considerable scale and far greater than any other building in Big or Little Blindhurst or the surrounding landscape. The buildings would be permanent additions to the landscape and replace the existing silage store.
16. The three positions assessed in the LVIA would enable long-ranging views from the south and south-west of the farm. From these positions, the proposed buildings would be viewed against the backdrop of Parlick and the farmsteads of Big and Little Blindhurst. There are, however, alternative viewpoints, which would result in the buildings being viewed in the context of the lowland landscape that extends towards Beacon Fell. Such viewpoints include, among others, PROW's to the east and south-east and from Parlick to the north. Users of the PROW's would be sensitive to the proposed changes given that the farm forms part of views to and from Parlick.
17. I recognise that the design is functional and reflective of modern farming practices, but the proposed designs do not contain traditional features which are characteristic to this part of the AONB. I note reference to the use of boarding on the side walls of the buildings, but this is not shown on the plans before me. The materials shown on the plans would not conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB, given that Big Blindhurst is characterised like others in the surrounding landscape of gritstone farm buildings. While there are some modern agricultural buildings nearby, none are of a scale as that proposed in Appeals A and B. Nor are they sited in an elevated landscape. Thus, they do not justify the use of the design or

materials proposed in either appeal scheme.

18. Farmsteads are part of the landscape, and therefore agricultural buildings would not in principle be out of sync with the landscape. However, due to the numerous public vantage points near to, and far away from the farm, and the scale, design and the proposed use of materials for Appeal schemes A and B, a detrimental visual impact would occur and a harm would be caused to visual amenity. As such, harm would be caused to the character and appearance of the area. I note that this view does not follow the opinion of the AONB officer, but landscaping would not mitigate this harm as it would take some time to reach maturity to screen the proposed buildings. The harm is also not mitigated by the siting of the proposed buildings, nor does the essential need for them, in accordance with saved LP Policy SP13, outweigh the harm that would be caused to what is a sensitive open landscape.
19. Regardless of whether or not the proposals are major development, I conclude that significant harm would be caused by the proposed development on the character and appearance of the Forest of Bowland AONB. The proposal would not accord with saved LP Policy SP14 or Framework paragraph 172 which jointly seek, among other things, high standards of design and use of materials for all types of development, so that the scale and extent of development within the AONB, where great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty, is limited.

### **Conclusions**

20. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that Appeals A and B should be dismissed.

*Andrew McGlone*

INSPECTOR