

GNLP Examination in Public, Friday 4 March 2022

Inspectors Matters, Issues and Questions

Matter 14, Issue 3, Policy COS5/GNLP2074: Norfolk Showground, Costessey

The Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association (RNAA) acquired its site at Costessey in 1952 and since 1954 has run its annual flagship event – the Royal Norfolk Show – there apart from 2000 and 2001 when the Covid Pandemic caused cancellation. In recent years the Showground has developed as an important destination – serving the local community as well as hosting events of regional and national importance – that both directly and indirectly enable the RNAA to fulfil its charitable objectives. The use of the Showground estate is varied and ranges from national events such as the Sundown Festival, to events of regional importance including NHS and East of England Energy Group conferences, and local trade fairs and music events. All commercial activity on the Showground supports the Charity's ability to support and encourage agriculture, by promoting education about, and an understanding of, food, farming and the countryside.

The Showground is a successful organisation both financially and culturally but the very substantial loss of its traditional income caused by the cancellation of the 2020 and 2021 shows and many other events has brought forward the need for the RNAA to retain its commercial viability by making greater use of its main asset, the Showground. In 2021 the RNAA adopted the following vision for the Showground:

*“ Any development of the Showground will provide a **commercially viable, robust and sustainable financial** footing for the RNAA to pursue its core aims and objectives.*

*The development will grow out of the Royal Norfolk Show and reinforce the RNAA's core objects by **creating a unique sense of place** reflecting the RNAA, reflecting its ethos, purpose and connection with **food, farming and the countryside**. Development will support and prepare for the next evolution of the Show.*

*The Showground will be a **flagship destination for Norfolk**, the region and beyond. It will have a local impact and be (inter-)nationally recognised.*

*The Showground will be an **open parkland, brought to life**, used and shaped by its communities and visitors.*

*The experience created by new development on the Showground will be a **show of shows, a festival ground**, rather than a single venue, which at its heart celebrates agriculture and food.*

*The Showground will become a place where people go for **enjoyment and connect with food, farming and the countryside**.”*

Policy COS5

The policy that has been proposed by the GNLP includes the words in clause 2:

“2. Any new building and extensions are required to support the main functions of the Showground.”

However, the last paragraph of the proposed policy states:

“Small scale Food retail, including an anchor unit selling a significant proportion of locally produced goods; café/restaurant/public house uses; and other leisure service uses, to serve the wider function of the Showground will also be considered.”

There is an obvious conflict between the very clear and specific restrictions in clause 2 and the much more open-ended words in the last paragraph. The RNAA feel that this conflict between the words in clause 2 and the last paragraph is liable to cause uncertainty and confusion in the future.

To avoid this potential uncertainty and confusion, the RNAA are proposing the deletion of the last paragraph in the proposed policy and have put forward the following alternative wording for clause 2:

“Small scale Food retail, including an anchor unit selling a significant proportion of locally produced goods; café/restaurant/public house uses; and other leisure and service uses, to serve the wider function of the showground will also be considered.”

Conclusion

The Inspectors are asked to recommend the changes to policy COS5 as set out above.

Mark Nicholas
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