
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 October 2016

by Helen Cassini BSc(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 22 November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/D2510/W/16/3153951

Land adjacent to The Blue Bell Inn, Ings Lane, Belchford, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6LQ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs Robert Pickles against the decision of East Lindsey District Council.
 - The application Ref S/013/01397/15, dated 23 July 2015, was refused by notice dated 3 March 2016.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 4 dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The proposal is for outline planning permission with matters of access, layout and scale of the development for consideration now. I shall consider the appeal accordingly.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - (i) whether occupants of the proposed houses would have acceptable access to facilities and services to meet daily living needs;
 - (ii) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, having particular regard to the appeal site's location in the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the AONB); and
 - (iii) the effect of the proposal on highway safety, with particular regard to the access to Ings Lane.

Reasons

Access to facilities and services

4. Policy A3 of the East Lindsey Local Plan Alteration 1999 (the LP) acknowledges that a number of villages have experienced a decline in both facilities and job opportunities over recent years. Furthermore, Policy A3 accepts that the revitalisation of villages is only likely to succeed if specific local needs are
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identified rather than increasing population numbers through speculative house building.

5. Also, Belchford is currently designated as a medium village within the LP. However, from the submitted Council's evidence I note that it is proposed to downgrade the village to a small village classification within the East Lindsey Draft Core Strategy 2016, due partly to the decline in services and facilities available in the village. Furthermore, I am also aware that the emerging plan does not propose any housing allocations within either small or medium villages.
6. I note that there is a relatively new recreation area located off Furlongs Lane and this could be accessed by foot or bicycle in approximately 10 minutes from the centre of the village. However, in general terms the village has limited facilities and services. Although the community has access to the Blue Bell Inn, a community hall and church, I understand that the post office has closed. Also the village does not have any schools or convenience stores. As such, I consider that the occupiers of the proposed houses would have to rely heavily on the facilities and services of other larger settlements to fully meet their daily living needs.
7. There is no suggestion in the evidence before me that public transport from the village would be adequate to allow a family's daily needs for access to be met. This is further supported by the appellant's evidence which confirms that the village does not have access to a good level of public transport and as such is reliant on private transport. Accordingly, this leads me to the conclusion that the occupiers would inevitably rely on the private motor vehicle, which is the least sustainable mode of transport. Whilst the proposal might not generate a large number of traffic movements, allowing the development in such a location would, nonetheless, increase the number of unsustainable journeys. This would be contrary to the aim of actively managing pattern of growth to make fullest possible use of sustainable transport options.
8. For these reasons, the proposal would not be a suitable site for housing in terms of its location and would conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). In addition conflict with Policy A3 of the LP exists which, amongst other things, seeks to locate growth in the most accessible and sustainable locations.

Character and appearance

9. Belchford village has a historic figure of eight street layout and from my site visit it was evident that two main clusters of houses exist with both having open central areas, one of these being the appeal site. There is a mix of architectural styles of houses throughout the village; however a distinctive character of spaciousness and openness was apparent.
10. The site is located within the AONB and the Framework makes it clear the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. AONBs have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. Therefore great weight should be given to the conservation of AONBs.
11. Due to the screening effect of the existing houses which surround the site, the majority of public views of the proposal would be limited to views from Ings

Lane. Although a low density of development is proposed, the construction of houses on the site would result in the loss of the currently vacant land and would therefore undermine the open character of the site. The loss of this space would also be visible to all of the residents whose houses back onto the site and would result in an urbanising effect. The further introduction of the type of domestic paraphernalia that is typically associated with housing would also add to the urbanising effect.

12. The proposal follows two refused outline planning applications¹ and a further subsequent dismissal of a related appeal². I acknowledge that the proposal has reduced in scale from the 2004 planning application by one house. Nevertheless given the scale and overall height of the proposal, four houses of the scale and height proposed would be clearly conspicuous and would result in a cramped and incongruous form of development.
13. In terms of conservation of the AONB, whilst reasonably localised in its extent and despite the presence of existing mature vegetation around part of its boundaries, the proposal would represent a harmful visual intrusion that would be at odds with the open quality of the appeal site. Accordingly, it would have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the AONB, conflicting with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.
14. The appellant has drawn my attention to proposals within villages of a similar scale. However, as no detailed information has been provided I cannot be certain that their particular circumstances are similar to the appeal scheme. In any event each proposal should be assessed on its own merits, as I have done in this instance.
15. In my view, the proposal before me fails to have proper regard to the existing pattern of development within the settlement and would, in turn, be harmful to the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB. Consequently, the proposal would not comply with Policies C11, A5 and H12 of the LP, which when taken together, amongst other things, state that the design of development must not harm the distinctive character of an area or the approach of paragraph 115 of the Framework.

Highway safety

16. Access to the site would be from Ings Lane, which is a narrow single lane track, which currently serves a small number of houses. Access to the car park at the rear of the Blue Bell Inn is also from Ings Lane.
17. Lincolnshire County Council, as the relevant highway authority, has raised concern with the level of visibility afforded in both directions when accessing Ings Lane. With regard to visibility in a northerly direction, following my site visit I concur that the trees and hedgerow, which I understand were present at the time of the application, have been removed. As such, visibility in this direction has been significantly improved. However, I note that the appellant does not own the hedgerow and as such, the vegetation may be replanted.
18. Turning my attention to visibility in a southerly direction, I accept that visibility is restricted by the Blue Bell Inn. Furthermore, it was evident that cars also

¹ Council references S/013/0290/03 and S/013/0266/04

² Appeal reference APP/D2510/A/1159293

park outside the public house on Ings Lane, which may further restrict visibility.

19. Although no evidence with regards to traffic movements have been provided, given the number of houses Ings Lane serves I do not consider that the lane would be heavily trafficked. Furthermore as the proposal would only consist of an additional four houses I consider that the increase in traffic generated would be limited and not materially significant to the number of vehicles accessing Ings Lane.
20. I acknowledge that the access onto Ings Lane may fail to meet modern day standards in terms of visibility splay guidance detailed in Manual for Streets. However, at the time of the application the Council confirmed that no road accidents had been reported in the area surrounding the junction in the last five years. As such, I have no evidence to confirm that even though the geometry and visibility standards of the junction may be technically substandard, they in themselves have actually led to a dangerous junction.
21. Taking into account all of the above I conclude that the vehicular access arrangements would not have an adverse impact on highway safety. I am satisfied that in line with policies TR3 and H12, and paragraph 35 of the Framework, the proposal would provide for a safe and suitable access.

Other Matters

22. It is recognised that the Government is seeking to significantly boost the supply of housing. However, the addition of only four units to the housing stock would be a very limited increase and consequently so too would the social and economic advantages arising from their construction and subsequent occupation. There is no substantive evidence to show that new residents of the houses would enhance or maintain the vitality of this rural community given that the village already has a very depleted range of services and facilities.
23. The units would need to be built in line with current building regulations and so would be energy efficient. Accordingly, in this respect the proposal could be said to help meet the challenge of climate change by providing energy efficient new homes. However, for the reasons given above, this benefit would be outweighed by the houses being in an unsustainable location and the dis-benefits that would bring of increased car use, contrary to the principle of moving to a low carbon economy.
24. I note the appellants comment with regards to affordable housing and whether this would be a more acceptable proposal. However, the scheme has not been advanced on this basis and I am required to assess each proposal on its own merits as it was submitted. Moreover, I have no details of how the affordability of the units could be secured. This is a matter that the appellants could more appropriately take up with the Council away from this appeal.
25. The Council accepts that there is a lack of a five year supply of deliverable housing sites and Policy A3 of the LP is relevant to the supply of housing. Paragraph 49 of the Framework states that in such cases the policy should not be considered up-to-date. This engages paragraph 14 of the Framework. However, in view of my finding of harm to the AONB, footnote 9 of paragraph 14 indicates that the development should be restricted. For the reasons given,

the other matters considered above do not outweigh either this harm or the harm arising in sustainability terms from the appeal site's location.

Conclusion

26. Although I have not found harm relating to highway safety, I have found adverse impacts in relation to the first two main issues and they are therefore the prevailing considerations. Therefore, having taken into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Helen Cassini

INSPECTOR