
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 December 2016

by Colin Cresswell BSc (Hons) MA MBA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 09 January 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/16/3157639

Land adjacent to Boscundle House, Boscundle, St Austell PL25 3RJ.

- 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 & Mrs Retallick against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA16/03836, dated 26 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 15 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing buildings and erection of a single detached dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The Cornwall Local Plan was adopted during the course of the appeal process. I have determined this appeal in accordance with the policies of this plan.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this case are:
 - whether the site provides a suitably accessible location for the proposed development, having regard to the provisions of local and national planning policy.
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location

4. The appeal site is within an area of low density residential development to the east of the main built up area of St Austell. Although the landscape to the east of St Austell is mostly rural in nature, the site is in relative proximity to a small group of dwellings in the vicinity of Boscundle Close to the west, together with the small settlement of Tregrehan Mill further to the north. There are also various retail and commercial developments situated along the A390 to the south-east and south-west of the appeal site. I note that a good deal of development has taken place in recent years and that the maps supplied by the Council do not entirely reflect the existing situation.
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5. I understand that Tregrehan Mill contains some community facilities in the form of a sports pitch and Methodist centre, but does not contain a village shop. Whilst the commercial area of Par Moor contains a public house and various retail offerings, these mainly constitute larger and more specialised retailers rather than places where everyday shopping needs can be easily met. Many of the retail offerings within Holmbush appear generally similar in this respect. Therefore, based on the information before me in this appeal, it would appear that the nearest place for general convenience shopping is the Tesco store at Daniels Lane which the Council say is 1.25 km from the appeal site. Therefore, whilst I recognise that there are a variety of community, retail and commercial developments within the general vicinity of the appeal site, they are not necessarily all capable of meeting typical day-to-day needs.
6. The appeal site is served by an access road which forms a junction with the A390 to the south. To the north of the site, the road links to a public footpath which provides connections to Boscundle Close, Tregrehan Mill and the eastern fringes of St Austell across the A391. However, much of the footpath route is isolated and unlit. Therefore, whilst the footpath might provide linkages to parts of the wider area, it would not necessarily present a particularly safe or attractive pedestrian route for all potential occupiers of the proposed dwelling, especially during hours of darkness.
7. For these reasons, I consider that the most desirable route for pedestrians wishing to access shops and services would be via the A390 to the south of the appeal site. Whilst this road is well lit, it is a major route through this part of Cornwall and therefore busy. In order to walk east from the appeal site towards the retail outlets at Par Moor, it would be necessary to cross the A390 to reach the pavement on the opposite side of the road. While there are formal crossings along some parts of this road, there is no crossing where the access road connecting to the appeal site forms a junction with the A390. Hence, the route to Par Moor raises potential conflicts between pedestrians and traffic. Although the route to Holmbush to the west is more pedestrian friendly, I have already established that access to everyday services, such as convenience shopping, would require a relatively long walk. As such, it may be beyond comfortable walking distance for all potential occupiers of the proposed dwelling. This may include the elderly and those with young children.
8. I note that there are cycleways along the A391 and given the relative proximity of St Austell, shops and services are reasonably accessible by bike. The wider area is well served by public transport and there are bus-stops to the north of the appeal site towards Tregrehan Mill and to the south-east along the A390. Although within walking distance for some, these bus-stops are not particularly close to the appeal site. Furthermore, I have already expressed some concern about the attractiveness of the pedestrian routes linking the appeal site with Tregrehan Mill to the north and the A390 heading east.
9. A core principle of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is to actively manage patterns of growth in order to make the *fullest possible* use of public transport, walking and cycling. Although I have found that the site would provide an accessible location for cycling, a new dwelling in this area would not make the fullest use of public transport and walking opportunities. Indeed, the indications are that future residents would be at least partially reliant on private vehicle journeys to meet their everyday needs.

10. Therefore, while the site may be closer to local services than some dwellings on the edge of St Austell, it does not benefit from an especially high degree of accessibility when considered against all modes of transport. I note that the recently adopted Cornwall Local Plan (the Local Plan) aims to steer the majority of new development towards the most accessible locations through planned housing allocations. Planned allocations of this nature have greater potential to provide infrastructure for local facilities, public transport and pedestrian and cycle linkages. In contrast, the appeal proposal would contribute incrementally to a dispersed pattern of growth that is more likely to cause environmental harm by encouraging car journeys and hence carbon emissions. As such, it is not an optimal location for new growth, even though it is not entirely isolated in term of paragraph 55 of the Framework.
11. Nonetheless, I recognise that Policy 3 of the Local Plan provides for limited development in smaller and less accessible settlements. However, according to paragraph 1.37 of the plan, settlements where infill development is permitted must have a form, shape and clearly definable boundary- not just a low density straggle of dwellings. Although there are other properties in the vicinity of the appeal site, these are separated by large areas of undeveloped space from the more definable boundaries of Tregrehan Mill and the group of housing around Boscundle Close. The small group of housing nearest to the appeal site has a less definable boundary and is more akin to the 'low density straggle of dwellings' described within the Local Plan. As such, the site cannot be said to be part of a clearly definable settlement where Policy 3 allows infill development to take place.
12. In reaching this decision, I have taken account of a previous Appeal Decision¹ where housing development was permitted in the countryside outside the defined settlement boundary of St Blazey. The Inspector's reasoning in that particular case was largely based on the fact that the policies of the former Restormel Local Plan were outdated. He therefore gave little weight to policies which restricted development in the countryside. In the current appeal, I am basing my decision on the recently adopted Cornwall Local Plan which has an up-to-date housing distribution strategy. I am therefore able to give its housing policies full weight.
13. I therefore conclude on this issue that the site would not provide a suitably accessible location for the proposed development. The proposal would conflict with Policy 3 of the Local Plan which governs housing distribution.

Character and appearance

14. The appeal site is accessed by a narrow, single track lane which serves a small group of low density dwellings. These are predominantly large properties set within substantially sized plots. Due to the prevalence of trees, vegetation and open spaces, the area maintains a highly rural appearance. The site itself comprises an open field containing concrete storage buildings. Mature trees within the site, including along its boundaries, help to maintain the distinctly rural characteristics of the surroundings.
15. As the proposed dwelling would be a relatively substantial detached property, it would be generally consistent with the pattern of development in the vicinity. Whilst the dwelling would clearly be larger and more prominent than the

¹ Appeal Decision: APP/D0840/W/15/3139576

storage buildings which it would replace, it would not appear particularly conspicuous within its immediate surroundings due to its set back from the road and the level of tree cover along the frontage. Although the character of the site would clearly alter, residential development is already a feature of the street scene in this location and the proposal would maintain the generally open and rural appearance of the lane.

16. I am mindful that the proposal would intensify built development in this location, which has more in common with the character of the countryside than that of the built up area of St Austell or nearby villages. However, the trees and vegetation in this area would prevent the dwelling from being easily seen within the wider landscape. Hence, the intrinsic beauty of the countryside would not be unduly harmed.
17. I therefore conclude on this issue that the proposal would have an acceptable effect on the character and appearance of the area. There would be no conflict with Policy 13 of the Cornwall Local Plan (the Local Plan) which seeks to promote good design and maintain local distinctiveness.

Conclusion

18. The Framework indicates that the overall purpose of the planning system is to achieve sustainable development, of which there are three dimensions; environmental, social and economic. In terms of the environmental dimension, I have found that the proposal would have an acceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area. However, the development would also cause harm by virtue of its relatively inaccessible location, which is likely to encourage use of private transport modes. This harm conflicts with a core principle of the Framework and I therefore assign it significant weight in my decision. Whilst the appellant argues that the proposal would make use of a previously developed site, the perceived benefits of this would not outweigh the harm I have identified.
19. Turning to the social dimension, I recognise that the proposal would result in a small contribution to the housing supply and a potential increase in the use of local shops and services. However, for a development of only one dwelling such benefits would be minor. Any economic benefits arising through the construction process would be similarly limited. Therefore, when taken as a whole, the proposal would not constitute sustainable development. The adverse impacts of granting planning permission for the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole.
20. For the above reasons, and having regard to all other matters raised, I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Colin Cresswell

INSPECTOR