
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 December 2016

by Rachel Walmsley BSc MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 03 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/16/3155302

Land at Church Street, Little Gransden, Cambridgeshire SG19 3DU

- 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 S Bacon against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref S/0525/16/FL, dated 24 February 2016, was refused by notice dated 7 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a dwelling-house.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. These are:
 - (i) whether the occupants of the proposed development would have acceptable access to shops and services; and,
 - (ii) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Policy Approach

3. There is no dispute that the Council cannot demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing. Paragraph 49 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) explains that, where this is the case, *relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date*. Policies DP/1 and DP/7 of the Local Plan¹ and ST/7 of the Core Strategy² direct development, including housing, to locations within the district. These policies are therefore housing supply policies.
4. Paragraph 14 of the Framework, at bullet point four, inset two, states that where specific policies listed in the Framework indicate that development should be restricted, permission should not be granted. The site is not within

¹ South Cambridgeshire District Council, Local Development Framework, Development Control Policies, Development Plan Document (adopted July 2007)

² South Cambridgeshire District Council, Local Development Framework, Core Strategy, Development Plan Document (adopted January 2007)

- an area that is restricted by the protections listed at footnote 9 of paragraph 14.
5. Bullet point four, inset one of paragraph 14 states that, where relevant policies are out of date, permission should be granted *unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole* which is the test that should be applied in this case.
 6. Parties agree that the appeal site is outside the village settlement of Little Gransden. Indeed, it was apparent from my site visit that the appeal site is surrounded by fields and mature landscaping and therefore has a greater affinity with the countryside than it does the village. For policy purposes, therefore, the appeal site is within the countryside.

Access to shops and services

7. The site is accessed via an unsurfaced track, deeply uneven and short of a footpath or lighting. The track forms part of a bridleway which leads into the open countryside one way and towards the villages of Little Gransden and Great Gransden via Church Road the other. The track in its current form provides little opportunity for persons who may choose to walk into the village to do so via a safe and suitable means and there are no proposals accompanying the proposed development to improve this situation. I note the proximity of the site to a bridleway however it is not clear how prospective residents would access local services and facilities via the bridleway. Such a route, unsurfaced and devoid of lighting, is not conducive to persons wishing to walk to the village.
8. Little Gransden does not have the facilities to meet the daily needs of prospective occupiers. The village has a public house, a village hall and a church, but no shops and other services and facilities required to support daily living. Indeed, policy ST/7 identifies Little Gransden as an infill village, the last of the four categories of rural settlement identified within the Core Strategy and therefore the least sustainable. Great Gransden is within half a mile of the site and has a village shop, post office, church and public house. The shop would better meet daily needs and in light of paragraph 55 of the Framework, the development would help support the livelihood of this rural community. Nevertheless, the facilities on offer are limited and therefore there would be a requirement to travel further afield for most employment opportunities and to access other facilities including main shopping trips, schools, banks and leisure facilities.
9. There is a bus stop within walking distance of the appeal site. The evidence before me suggests that the bus stop serves the city of Cambridge, St Neots and Eltisley. Whilst Cambridge could more than adequately cater for daily needs, I am not convinced that one bus to and from the city at commuting times and with limited services at the weekend would be frequent enough to meet the daily needs of prospective occupiers. I have no details of the facilities on offer at St Neots or Eltisley to know if these settlements could better serve people's needs. However, irrespective of the bus service on offer, I have found that the access from the site would not provide a safe or suitable means for prospective occupiers to access the bus stop which also undermines the benefits the development could bring to local communities.

10. It is highly probable, therefore, that occupiers would use the private car. Given the size of the dwelling proposed, the number of journeys made between the dwelling and local services and facilities would be notable. The effect of allowing the development proposed in a functionally isolated location would result in unsustainable journeys, contrary to a core land use planning principle of the Framework which seeks to actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling.
11. In all, therefore, I find that occupants of the proposed development would not have acceptable access to shops and services. Consequently the development would be contrary to the Framework and to Policies DP/1 and DP/7 of the Local Plan and ST/7 of the Core Strategy.

Character and appearance

12. The appeal site forms part of a wider paddock and stabling area, largely surrounded by fields and mature landscaping. Together with the position of the site off a track and bridleway and away from existing built development, the site is tranquil and rural in character.
13. By virtue of the site currently being undeveloped, a building on the site and to the scale proposed would have a notable presence. Whilst the 'barn style' of the proposal would reflect the rural character of the area and it is not clear how much of the existing landscaping would be retained and therefore to what extent to the development would be screened, the scale and form of the development would urbanise the site, encroaching into the countryside. Associated with a three bedroomed property would be vehicular and pedestrian movements related to the daily comings and goings of its residents. This would be harmful to the tranquil and rural character of the site and its surroundings.
14. I recognise that the building opposite the appeal site extends the line of built development from the village. However the form and scale of this building is more subservient to its surroundings than the development proposed and therefore does not encroach into the countryside in the same way as the new dwelling would.
15. I have found harm to the character and appearance of the area by virtue of the form and scale of the building and the activities associated with it. For this reason the proposal would be contrary to policies DP/1(p) and DP/3(2(m)) of the Local Plan which seeks to ensure that development does not have an adverse impact on the character of the local landscape and countryside.

Other considerations

16. I have before me details of planning permissions for housing development which the appellant suggests set a precedent in favour of the appeal. The reasons for approving the housing development at 84 Main Road, Little Gransden (planning application ref S/1897/14/OL) included the site being close to lit pavements and bus stops. This does not compare with the current proposal which I have found to be within an unsustainable location and short of appropriate alternatives to the motor car for travel and therefore does not carry much weight in favour of the appeal.
17. Planning applications ref S/3209/15/OL (Land at Willow Tree House) and ref S/1945/15/PB (Land at Church Street) were approved for reasons that included

the sites being within a reasonable distance of services and facilities. Both sites are within close proximity of the appeal site and outside a settlement. In light of the evidence before me and my findings about the site's location, these sites are broadly comparable with the current proposal. I therefore give some weight to the Council's view that development close to the appeal site is within a reasonable distance of services and facilities. However, each case must be decided on its own merits and based on the evidence before me I have found the appeal proposal unacceptable judged against the two main issues.

18. Also before me is planning application S/0852/FL for development on land to the rear of No 6 Primrose Hill. The decision notice before me does not explain the reasoning behind the Council's decision on this application and therefore I am unable to draw any comparisons with the current proposal to assess its weight in the appeal overall.
19. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I find that the development would not result in any harm to biodiversity or to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. These matters are neutral in the planning balance.

Balancing and Conclusion

20. Returning to bullet point 4, inset one of paragraph 14 of the Framework, I have found that occupants would not have acceptable access to shops and services. The development therefore would be within a functionally isolated and therefore unsustainable location. I have also found that the development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area.
21. Weighed against this is the benefit one dwelling would bring to the Council's housing supply. The Council has a shortfall in housing land supply, although the contribution one dwelling would make to this is limited. The development would benefit the local economy, creating jobs during construction, although once again with limited benefits given the scale of the proposal. There is also the limited precedent set by the Council of allowing housing within close proximity to the appeal site.
22. In the context of the Framework, the adverse impacts of allowing the development would not be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the benefits. The development would be contrary to policies DP/1 and DP/7 of the Local Plan and ST/7 of the Core Strategy, although the weight that I can attach to this conflict in light of the Council's lack of a 5 year housing land supply is limited. Notwithstanding this, the development would conflict with the Framework as discussed and would therefore be an unsustainable form of development and harmful to the character and appearance of the area. For these reasons the appeal is dismissed.

R Walmsley

Inspector