
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 January 2017

by Andrew Owen BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 13 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3425/W/16/3162353

Land at Trent Road, Stone, Staffordshire ST15 8LE

- 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 Chris Jaram & James Preston against the decision of Stafford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 15/23033/OUT, dated 30 September 2015, was refused by notice dated 22 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is residential development of up to 11 dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The application was originally made in outline form with all matters except access and layout to be reserved for later consideration. However during the Council's determination of the application the appellant withdrew matters of layout. As such the Council determined the application in outline with only matters of access for consideration, and I have determined the appeal on the same basis.
3. Part 2 of the Council's Plan for Stafford Borough (PSB2) was adopted on 31 January 2017. Both parties were given the opportunity to comment on its relevance to the appeal.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposed development would represent proportionate sustainable growth.

Reasons

5. Part 1 of The Plan for Stafford Borough 2011 – 2031 (PSB1) was adopted in June 2014. Policy SP2 of this document states that provision will be made for 500 dwellings to be built per annum over the plan period i.e. 10,000 in total. Policy SP4 of the PSB1 sets out the proportions of these homes that should be built in Stafford, Stone, the key service villages and the rest of the borough. The parties agree that the Council can demonstrate a five year supply of housing land and I therefore consider these policies are up to date and can be given considerable weight.
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6. The proportions in Policy SP4 reflect the level of services and facilities within the settlements and also aim to redress historic patterns of house building in the borough which was more concentrated in the rural areas. This Policy advises that 10% of the Borough's new housing will be within Stone, which equates to 1,000 homes in Stone over the plan period. It is not disputed between the parties that the 1,000 figure is a target, not a limit, and this is supported by the appeal case quoted by the appellant¹, and by the fact that a moratorium to restrict house building above this figure was considered unsound by the Inspector into PSB2.
7. The Council's Statement of Five Year Housing Land Supply (at 31st March 2016) shows that house building throughout the Borough is slightly below the PSB1 target, although this same document makes it clear that there are enough commitments in the Borough over the next five years to make up the shortfall. Conversely, house building in Stone is far above the PSB1 target and, as of March 2015, there were 1,105 commitments in Stone including 625 units over the next five years. These commitments do not include the proposed development.
8. I accept the proposal is relatively small in relation to the housing targets for Stone and would not significantly add to the total number of homes in the town. For this reason it is not directly comparable with the development at Ashflats² referred to by the Council, where the proposal was for 320 units on a greenfield site. Nonetheless, despite agreeing that the PSB1 targets are not ceilings, the Inspector into that appeal concluded that the development at Ashflats would not have accorded with the plan-led system which is a fundamental principle of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') and is articulated through the PSB1.
9. So whilst I agree the PSB1 target is not a limit, this does not outweigh the fact that the Council have an up to date development plan, can currently demonstrate a five year supply of housing and that in Stone there are already housing commitments which exceed the PSB1 target. As such the proposed development would conflict with the plan-led principle and would prejudice the proportionate sustainable growth of the Borough.
10. Furthermore Policy SP7 of the PSB1 advises that development boundaries will be established in PSB2 and within these boundaries, development in accordance with the proportions in Policy SP4, would be supported. Though I understand that previously the appeal site was shown to be part of Stone, the maps accompanying PSB2 show the appeal site to be excluded from the settlement boundary of the town. Policy SP7 goes on to add that only where insufficient sites on previously developed land, in sustainable locations, are available to meet new development requirements should greenfield sites be released.
11. I acknowledge the site has good access to public transport, as there are bus stops a short distance from the site on Newcastle Road, and it is within walking distance of Stone town centre. Accordingly it can be considered to be reasonably sustainably located. Also it is clear that Stone, as one of the largest settlements in the Borough, is generally a sustainable location for new development. However because the Council can demonstrate that there are

¹ APP/D0840/A/13/2209757

² APP/Y3425/A/14/2217578

already sufficient sites to meet new development requirements in Stone, there is no need to release greenfield sites for development, such as the appeal site.

12. Accordingly I consider that the proposal would not represent proportionate sustainable growth in the Borough and so would be contrary to Policy SP4 and Policy SP7 of the PSB1 which aim to direct housing proportionately to locations to support sustainable growth. It would also fail to accord with the Framework which, in paragraph 17, identifies a plan-led system as one its core principles.

Other Matters

13. A planning obligation has been provided within which there is an undertaking to provide affordable housing. I consider this would be necessary to make the development acceptable in this regard, is directly related to the development and is fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposal. As such I consider this obligation would be necessary and I can take it into account. However, though I recognise the local shortfall of affordable housing, I do not consider the limited benefit of three affordable units would outweigh the harm identified above.
14. The planning obligation also seeks to provide financial contributions towards education and open space provision. In light of my conclusion on the main issue I need not consider these further.
15. I recognise the benefit both economically and socially resulting from the construction and occupation of 11 units. This benefit would be considerable, consistent with the view taken by the Inspectors in the appeals referred to by the appellant³. Nonetheless, such benefits would result from any development of this nature, including development which would accord Policy SP4, and so these benefits do not outweigh the conflict with Policy SP4.
16. The provision of a pavement outside the site would primarily serve only the proposed houses and would be of limited wider benefit. The appellant refers to a future intention to provide 14 units on an adjacent site. Nevertheless without further details of this, I can give it only very minimal weight.
17. I cannot attach any weight to any on site environmental benefits the scheme may provide, such as formal planting and the creation of a pond, as these would be set out and assessed as part of a reserved matters application.

Conclusions

18. For the reasons given above, and taking account of all other considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Andrew Owen

INSPECTOR

³ APP/B3438/A/14/2217581 & APP/P3420/A/14/2222484