
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 February 2017

by Andrew Owen BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 27 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/W/16/3164359
Stablebridge Road, Aston Clinton, HP22 5ND

- 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 John Cattermole against the decision of Aylesbury Vale District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/02995/APP, dated 14 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 6 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is erection of eco-friendly 3 bedroom family home and garage with access from Stablebridge Road. Change of use from agricultural to residential.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The site is located on the west side of Stablebridge Road opposite Flora Avenue which comprises a new housing development. There are also a few detached houses further north along the eastern side of Stablebridge Road. To the north of the site there are fields, which were being grazed by sheep at the time of my site visit. These fields separate the site from London Road along which Aston Clinton is focussed. South west of the site the land is densely wooded and this forms a visual barrier between the site and the Green Park Activity Village.
 4. The context of the appeal site is therefore partly influenced by the houses on the eastern side of Stablebridge Road, but more strongly by the rural and verdant character of the adjacent land. Indeed the contrast between the openness of the fields north of the site with the built development on the eastern side of Stablebridge Road, means the road itself acts as a tangible boundary to Aston Clinton.
 5. The proposal would introduce built development into a plot which is currently undeveloped. The development would therefore be seen as an encroachment of housing into the open countryside beyond the boundary of the settlement. This would disrupt the rural character of this side of the road and compromise the strength of the settlement boundary.
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6. Also, from positions along London Road, the dwelling would be seen against the backdrop of the woodland to the south and in the context of the fields in the foreground. Indeed from this position it would appear more prominently than the housing development in Flora Avenue. Furthermore, the layout of the proposal would allow for very little in the way of vegetative screening along the site's northern boundary. Consequently, though the dwelling would not be excessive in its scale or height, it would visually contrast with its open surroundings.
7. I understand that previously there were buildings at the former Old Rectory Farm to the north west of the site. However these buildings are no longer there and instead the land in this area is open and undeveloped and also contributes to the rural character of the immediate vicinity.
8. The Council suggest they can demonstrate a five year supply of housing land, but concede that their policies relating to the supply of housing should not be considered up to date. In such circumstances paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') advises that permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. I accept the development would be of some benefit to the local economy, would make a limited contribution to the Council's supply of housing, and would be designed with sustainable principles at the forefront including high levels of insulation, thermal efficiency, and a low carbon footprint. These amount to substantial benefits. However, I give considerable weight to the harm that would be caused to the rural character and open appearance of the area resulting from the introduction of built form. I consider this harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh these benefits.
9. As such, the development would fail to accord with Policy GP35 of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan which requires new development to respect and compliment, among other things, the characteristics of its surroundings. It would also conflict with the advice in the Framework which, as one of its core planning principles, requires development to take account of the character of the area.
10. The appellant refers to a considerable amount of recent housing development in Aston Clinton, some of which is on greenfield sites. However from the details provided this all appears to be within the envelope of the settlement. In particular the most proximate of those housing sites, along London Road, are all seen within the context of the existing ribbon development along London Road. The appeal site differs from these examples because it is set apart from London Road and visually separated, by Stablebridge Road, from the residential development opposite.

Other matters

11. I acknowledge the local support for the scheme, and can understand the appellant's wish to remain within the village, of which he has been resident for over 20 years, whilst providing a larger house for his family. I can also appreciate that it may appear contradictory for Aston Clinton to be subject to considerable amounts of housebuilding, yet the proposals for one house at the

appeal site are repeatedly prevented¹. However, as set out above, it is the character of this site that results in the proposed dwelling being unacceptable.

12. I also recognise the support for self-build homes by central government, and the role that they can play in the delivery of housing. However this is just one consideration and, as advised in the letter from the Minister of State for Housing and Planning to the appellant's MP, decisions will need to be made in the light of all policies in the Framework. As I have concluded above, the proposal would not accord with one of the core planning principles of the Framework.
13. Furthermore from the limited details I have of the self-build house referred to by the appellant², it is clear that in that case the Inspector considered that the harm caused to the character and appearance of that area did not significantly outweigh the benefits of a self-build house to contribute to that Council's supply of housing. In this case, whilst I acknowledge the benefits of an additional property to add to the Council's supply and the support that can be given to self-build houses, I do not consider it outweighs the harm that would be caused to the character and appearance of the area.

Conclusion

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

Andrew Owen

INSPECTOR

¹ By the refusal of planning applications Refs 15/00718/APP, 16/02995/APP and appeal Ref APP/J0405/W/15/3027450

² Appeal ref APP/C1570/A/14/2223280