
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 February 2017

by Nick Palmer BA (Hons) BPI MRTPI

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

Decision date: 6th March 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/F2605/W/16/3161382

2 Wooden Bungalows, West Tofts, Thetford, Norfolk IP26 5ER

- 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 Mrs Christine Merrick against the decision of Breckland District Council.
 - The application Ref 3PL/2015/1283/O, dated 30 October 2015, was refused by notice dated 30 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is demolition of a redundant light industrial unit and the erection of a new bungalow.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application was made by Christine Lambert and her agent has confirmed that the different surname as given on the appeal form is her married name.
3. The application is for outline permission with layout and means of access for consideration. No details have been provided in these respects other than a site location plan and a tree constraints plan. I shall consider the proposal on the basis of those plans and the other information submitted.
4. The Council's officer delegated report includes reference to personal circumstances but the appellant has pointed out that this was an error on the part of the Council and that no such personal circumstances were put forward. The Council has not responded on this point but I shall nevertheless disregard the relevant part of the Council's report which makes reference to those circumstances.

Main Issue

5. The main issue in the appeal is whether or not the proposal would accord with national and local planning policies for housing development in the countryside with reference to the accessibility of the site to services and facilities by sustainable means.

Reasons

6. The appeal site is in the countryside and adjacent to land which forms part of West Tofts Army Camp. The site is next to a small group of dwellings that are served by a cul-de-sac road. It is occupied by a building of blockwork and
-

- cladding with lean-to extensions which I understand has been disused for about 20 years and was previously used for meat processing.
7. Policies CP14 and DC2 of the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies¹ (CSDCP) direct residential development to sites within settlement boundaries as identified on the proposals map. The site is not within any settlement boundary and so does not accord with those policies.
 8. When the Council made its decision it did not have a five year supply of deliverable housing sites. Since then the Council has published details of its five year supply² which is calculated to be over 5 years. However that supply is based on an objectively assessed need which derives from a lower annual housing requirement in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment rather than from the higher figure in the CSDCP. While the former figure may be more up to date than the latter it has not been subject to examination. Moreover the CSDCP figure remains part of the development plan. No evidence has been put forward to demonstrate that that figure is out of date. For these reasons and given that the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires the supply of housing to be boosted significantly I have doubt as to the robustness of the Council's housing land supply assessment. On this basis I shall assume that policies CP14 and DC2 of the CSDCP are not up to date. This limits the weight that I can give to them.
 9. Paragraph 14 of the Framework presumes in favour of sustainable development. Where relevant policies are out of date, permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
 10. The nearest settlements are some distance away from the site. Lynford is a small village said by the Council to have no services or facilities. Mundford is about 3.9 km away and is a larger village. No details of any facilities in that village have been provided but it is clear given the remoteness of the site that the occupants of the proposed dwelling would be totally reliant on the car for transport and the appellant does not dispute this. The proposal would not accord with key provisions of the Framework including the core planning principle of making the fullest use of walking, cycling and public transport and the avoidance of new homes in the countryside that are isolated from services and facilities. Because of this significant departure from national policy I give very significant weight to this consideration.
 11. Because the site is occupied by an existing building the proposal would be unlikely to result in visual harm. Indeed I saw that the building is in a dilapidated condition and that it detracts from its surroundings. Although details of the proposal are not before me I acknowledge that there would be likely to be some benefit in improving the appearance of the site which weighs in its favour. The existing building may be taller than would be expected for a bungalow but its overall size is unlikely to be significantly different and no specific benefit in terms of a reduction in the extent of built form has been identified.
 12. The Framework encourages the re-use of previously developed land provided that it is not of high environmental value. The site is within a buffer zone for

¹ Breckland Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (2009)

² Breckland Statement of Five Year Housing Land Supply (30.09.2016)

the stone curlew, an important protected species. It is also close to nationally and internationally designated habitats³. Natural England has advised that the proposal would not significantly affect those habitats but nonetheless the proximity of those areas together with the stone curlew buffer zone designation indicate that the site is of some environmental value. This weighs against the benefit arising from its redevelopment and visual improvement. For these reasons the weight that I give to this benefit is limited.

13. The proposal would be of benefit in providing a new unit of housing which would contribute to the housing supply. However the scale of that benefit would be limited and for this reason I can only give limited weight to this.
14. The appellant points out that if the building were to be re-used for employment purposes this would generate vehicular traffic, the volume of which may be greater than would be the case for the proposed dwelling. While this may be the case, the building has remained vacant for 20 years and there is no evidence that its re-use is a realistic possibility.
15. I have given very significant weight to the harm that I have identified in terms of reliance on the car for transport and lack of accessibility by sustainable means. I also give limited weight to the conflict with development plan policy. Those weights significantly and demonstrably outweigh the limited weights that I have given to the benefits in terms of the visual improvement of the site and the provision of a new unit of housing.
16. The proposal would accord with the economic dimension of sustainable development in terms of the employment that would be generated during its construction. It would accord with the social dimension by providing a new unit of housing. Any visual improvement to the site would accord with the environmental dimension. The extent to which the proposal would accord with those dimensions would however be limited for the reasons given, including the limited scale of the development.
17. There is no evidence before me to demonstrate that the proposal would be of particular benefit to the rural community in terms of support for local services. The harm that I have identified in terms of the reliance on the private car for transport would weigh heavily against the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Considered as a whole, for the reasons given the proposal would not be a sustainable form of development.

Conclusions

18. For the reasons given the proposal would not accord with national and local planning policies for housing development in the countryside. For these reasons I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Nick Palmer

INSPECTOR

³ Breckland Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Stanford Training Area Norfolk SSSI, Breckland Special Protection Area and Breckland Special Area of Conservation