
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 February 2017

by Alexander Walker MPlan MRTPI

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

Decision date: 16th March 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3425/W/16/3164365

High House, Gnosall Road, Knightley, Stafford ST20 0JS

- 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 John Clapham against the decision of Stafford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 16/24341/OUT, dated 9 June 2016, was refused by notice dated 12 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is 1 bungalow on an infill site between High House and White Cottage at Knightley.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The application was submitted in outline with all matters reserved for future consideration. I have dealt with the appeal on this basis. Plans were submitted with the application indicating the access, site layout and elevations of the proposal. Whilst the plans are not identified as illustrative, I have considered them on this basis.
3. Following the Council's determination of the application, the Plan for Stafford Borough: Part 2 was adopted on 31st January 2017. Both parties have been given the opportunity to comment on this and I have had regard to the comments received in determining the appeal.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the development would accord with the Council's housing strategy.

Reasons

Housing Strategy

5. The appeal site is an open area of land that has a metal sheet shed on it. The site is located between High House, to the north, and White Cottage, to the south. An existing opening provides access to the site off the adjacent Gnosall Road. The surrounding rolling verdant fields interspersed with sporadic residential and agricultural development provide a rural character to the area.
6. Policy SP3 of The Plan for Stafford Borough (LP) 2011-2031 (adopted June 2014) states that the majority of future development will be delivered through

the sustainable settlement hierarchy. Gnosall is identified as a Key Service Village in terms of the range of facilities and falls within tier 3 of the hierarchy. Whilst the appeal site is within the Parish of Gnosall, it is not within the settlement boundary of Gnosall. It does not fall within any of the hierarchy tiers.

7. The Gnosall Neighbourhood Plan (GNP) adopted July 2015 sets out that at least 230 dwellings will be provided within the settlement boundary between 2011-2031. At least a further 20 dwellings will be provided in the rural area, which will contribute towards the 8% housing requirement for the rest of the Borough as set out in Policy SP4 of the LP. The Council argues that there are already 22 completions/commitments in the rural area and therefore the minimum target of 20 has already been exceeded.
8. Policy C5 of the LP allows for new residential development outside the settlements identified in Policy SP3, subject to certain requirements. The first requirement is that it must be demonstrated that the provision cannot be accommodated within the hierarchy set out in Policy SP3. There is no evidence before me that there is no provision within the hierarchy for a single dwelling.
9. The second requirement states that a Parish based Local Housing Needs Assessment and an appraisal of the scheme shall accompany the planning application, proving that it will meet the defined needs. Based on the evidence before me, the GNP is the most up-to-date Parish Local Housing Needs Assessment. I acknowledge that the target of 20 dwellings in the rural area is not a maximum figure. However, there are already 22 completions/commitments. Furthermore, the Council confirms that the total housing requirement of 8% for the rest of the Borough, as set out in Policy SP4, has already been met. Not only that, the total number of dwellings that have been completed or committed in the rest of the Borough has already met the minimum target for the lifetime of the development plan.
10. Policies SP7 and E2 of the LP also support residential development in rural areas outside settlements identified in Policy SP3 of the LP, subject to it being in accordance with, amongst other matters, Policy C5 of the LP.
11. The appellant has not argued that the Council cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites. Although the Council have not confirmed that they have one, there is no evidence to suggest that they do not. Accordingly, policies in the LP and GNP relating to the supply of housing are therefore up-to-date. Therefore, paragraph 49 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is not engaged. Moreover, I find that the policies within the LP are consistent with the Framework and there is no evidence to suggest otherwise. Accordingly I attribute considerable weight to policies SP3, SP4, SP7, E2 and C5 of the LP and the GNP.
12. Whilst the housing targets are not a maximum, they nevertheless must be delivered sustainably. I consider that any further growth, even a single dwelling, at such an early stage in the development plan's lifetime would not represent sustainable growth and would undermine the Council's strategic approach to providing residential development throughout the Borough. I find therefore that the proposal would fail to accord with the Council's housing strategy, as embodied in Policies SP3, SP7, E2 and C5 of the LP and the GNP.

Planning Balance

13. Whilst the Framework promotes sustainable development, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not exist outside paragraph 14 of the Framework. Paragraph 7 of the Framework identifies three dimensions to sustainable development – economic, social and environmental.
14. The appellant argues that Gnosall Parish Council support the proposal as it would provide a bungalow which is what the local residents want. Whilst I acknowledge the Parish Council's support, there is no substantive evidence before me that there is an identifiable need for bungalows above and beyond the general housing requirement for the Parish.
15. Notwithstanding the above, the construction of the dwelling would provide economic benefit to the local economy through the creation of jobs in the construction industry. Once constructed, the occupants of the dwelling would also contribute to the economy by using local services and facilities. However, given the scale of the development, this benefit would be limited.
16. A bungalow would also make a positive contribution to the mix and range of dwellings to accommodate the needs of the local community. Furthermore, the occupants would make a contribution to the general community life of the village.
17. The appellant states that the site is in a village location. However, from the evidence before me and the observations I made during my site visit, it is in an isolated location, some distance from the nearest settlement and community facilities and services. The adjacent road has no footways and is unlit and therefore it is reasonable to conclude that occupiers of the dwelling would be reliant on the use of private vehicles to access basic facilities and services such as shops, schools, health services and employment.
18. Paragraph 55 of the Framework promotes sustainable development in rural areas, providing it would enhance and maintain the vitality of rural communities. However, it also restricts isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances. I am not satisfied that there are any special circumstances that would justify the development.
19. I conclude therefore that the proposal represents a new isolated dwelling within the open countryside in an unsustainable location, relying heavily on car transport, for which there are no special circumstances. It therefore fails to accord with the requirements of the Framework. Whilst it offers some economic and social benefits, these do not outweigh the harm it would have to the environment by way of its reliance on private transport or the harm to the Council's ability to deliver sustainable growth.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons given above, having regard to all matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Alexander Walker

INSPECTOR