
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 March 2017

by Claire Searson MSc PGDip BSc (Hons) MRTPI IHBC

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

Decision date: 25 April 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y2620/W/16/3163435

Larkfields, 144 Morston Road, Blakeney, Holt, Norfolk, NR25 7BG

- 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 and Mrs Michael Goff against the decision of North Norfolk District Council.
 - The application Ref PF/16/1245, dated 1 September 2016, was refused by notice dated 7 November 2017.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing house and erection of a new house.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the area, with specific regard to the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Undeveloped Coast.

Reasons

3. Policy SS2 of the North Norfolk Core Strategy 2008 (CS) limits development in the countryside, subject to a number of exemptions, including the replacement of existing dwellings. Policy HO8 requires that such developments would not result in a disproportionality large increase in the height and scale of the original dwelling and would not materially increase the impact of the dwelling on the appearance of the surrounding countryside. The policy also defines what constitutes a disproportionately larger increase in respect of the size of the existing dwelling, the extent to which it has been or could be extended and the prevailing character of the area.
 4. The appeal site comprises of a 2-storey dwelling and outbuildings set in extensive grounds which extend out towards the North Norfolk Coast. These are landscaped with trees, tall hedgerows, formal gardens and informal meadows. The property is accessed via the A149 Morston Road. A separate dwelling, Lark Cottage, which is also in the same ownership, shares this access and is located to the west of Larkfields.
 5. The appeal site is located within the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and falls within the Undeveloped Coast, a local designation within the CS which recognises the undeveloped character of the coast which contributes to North Norfolk's distinctiveness and economy (Policy EN3). The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) acknowledges that the
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- landscape around the site is of high value given the highly distinctive and sensitive landscape of the AONB.
6. The proposal would involve the demolition of Larkfields and the outbuildings. The replacement dwelling would be relocated and re-orientated in the plot further towards the east, in part of the area where the existing outbuildings are located. The main part of the dwelling would be 2-storey with 3-bedrooms. There would also be an attached single storey wing, accommodating a boot room, utility, office and garaging.
 7. The existing dwelling has a floor area of around 293 sq m and including the existing outbuildings and garages this totals around 410 sq m. The proposed dwelling would have a floor area of around 535 sq m, and including the single storey wing and garaging this would be around 772 sq m.
 8. While the appellant cites that such an increase is only to be expected in the replacement of 1930's dwelling of little merit and that the Council have no concern with the overall 'New England' design concept, that is not the test in which CS Policy HO8 specifies. I consider that an increase of around 80% cannot reasonably be considered as anything other than disproportionately larger.
 9. Larkfields is located to the northern end of a ridgeline formed by the Blakeney Esker. The topography then falls away to the north towards salt marshes which are found along this stretch of coastline. However, in spite of the raised topography, the existing dwelling and outbuildings are inconspicuous in the landscape, due to their layout and existing mature landscaping.
 10. Due to the relocation and reorientation of the dwelling within the plot, coupled with the increased scale and massing of the proposed dwelling, I consider that there would be increased visibility of the development. Based on the findings of the LVIA, the proposal would be visible from a number of viewpoints along the Peddlars Way and Norfolk Coast Path. This is a long distance footpath which extends along the coastline north of the site, linking the settlements of Blakeney and Morston.
 11. Specifically, as evidenced by the LVIA, the development would have a significant visual presence from viewpoints taken from the footpath adjacent to the boundary of the site. This effect would be diminished in respect of longer distance view points from Blakeney, and views from the north as well as from the A149 would also be limited. As such the visual impact of the development would therefore be relatively localised. Nevertheless, such impacts would still be experienced from vantage points from within a highly sensitive landscape and I find that there would be a material increase in the impact of the replacement dwelling in the area.
 12. A comprehensive landscape strategy has been included as part of the proposals in order to mitigate the impacts of the development in the longer term. Groups of trees are proposed to blend in with the adjacent wooded SSSI to the north of the site. However, this would take a great number of years to be effective and I am also concerned that the new landscaping itself could appear contrived and impact upon the general open landscape character. Furthermore, even with additional planting, there would also be seasonal impacts and I consider that it would be likely that there would be much clearer views of the development during the winter months when trees are not in leaf.

13. I note a number of modern developments in the area, including the Bliss development which is located in a prominent position in proximity to the appeal site. However, I consider that the prevailing character of the area relates to the general open and undeveloped landscape of the AONB and undeveloped coast. Therefore, while there are examples of other large scale developments in the area, this would not justify such a significant increase in scale in respect of the proposals before me and the increased prominence that would occur in such a sensitive landscape.
14. It is understood that the Bliss Development was allowed at appeal. My attention has also been drawn to Three Owls Farm which was again allowed at appeal. However, copies of these decisions have not been provided, nor do I have any details of the specific considerations which led to those proposals being accepted.
15. Following the refusal of planning permission reference PF/15/1312, I note that the appellant has sought to make a number of changes to the scheme in order to address the concerns of the Council. However, in finding harm, I have dealt with the current appeal proposals on their own merits, based upon the evidence before me and my own observations at the site visit. Neither is my concern outweighed by there being some local support for the development, including from the Parish Council's.
16. Overall, due to the scale and bulk of the proposed dwelling and its visibility, I conclude that the development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and would not accord with Policy HO8 or Policy SS2. The development would also fail to accord with Policy EN4 which seeks ensures that the scale and massing of buildings relate sympathetically to the surrounding area. The development would also conflict with paragraphs 61 and 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which require integration of new development into the natural environment and improvements to character.
17. In addition, the proposal would cause harm to the landscape character of the area, including the designated Undeveloped Coastline in conflict with Policies EN2 and EN3 as well as paragraph 114 of the Framework which seeks to maintain the character of the undeveloped coast. The development would also materially detract from special qualities of the AONB, and would not accord with Policy EN1 in this regard. AONB's have the highest status of protection in respect of their landscape and scenic value and as required by paragraph 115 of the Framework, I give this harm to the AONB great weight.

Other matters

18. Concerns are raised by the appellant regarding the handling of the application by the Council, however this is a matter between parties and has no bearing on my assessment of the appeal based upon its planning merits.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons given above, taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Searson
INSPECTOR