
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 July 2017

by Zoe Raygen Dip URP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 14 August 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/W/17/3170265

West Farm, The Lane, Easton PE28 0TY

- 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 Jon Wright against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/02137/FUL, dated 7 October 2016, was refused by notice dated 1 December 2016
 - The development proposed is the temporary siting of up to 6 caravans for senior staff working on the A14 project for the fixed term of the project. The application also includes details of black waste removal and recycling waste removal.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matter

2. At the time of my site visit there were five caravans on the appeal site. Consequently, I have dealt with the appeal in accordance with Section 73A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - Whether the site represents a suitable location for the proposed development with particular regard to accessibility
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area
 - The effect of the proposal on highway safety

Reasons

Location

4. Policy En17 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan Part One 1995 (LP) states that development outside the defined village environmental limits will be restricted to that essential to the efficient operation of local agriculture, horticulture, forestry, permanent mineral extraction, outdoor recreation or public utility services. Furthermore Policy H23 of the LP states that there is a general presumption against housing development outside environmental limits with the exception of dwellings required for agriculture, forestry or horticulture. In

addition Policy CS3 of the Huntingdonshire Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2009 (CS) states that development in the open countryside would be limited to that essential to be located there.

5. Although the proposal is not housing development it does provide residential accommodation and therefore would, in my opinion, reasonably be subject to the requirements of Policy H23. The appeal site is located outside of the environmental limits of the village of Easton as defined within paragraph 5.15 of the CS and does not meet any of the criteria of the above policies. As a result, the proposal would be contrary to the requirements of Policies En17 and H23 of the Local Plan and Policy CS3 of the CS. However, I find that the Policies are considerably more restrictive than the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), paragraph 55 of which seeks to promote sustainable development in rural areas by the location of housing where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities, and avoid isolated dwellings in the open countryside.
6. Easton is defined as a smaller settlement within Policy CS3 of the CS where schemes of residential infilling of up to three dwellings may be acceptable within the built up area. There is a significant gap between the caravans and the detached properties on The Lane with adjoining open fields on three sides. Whilst therefore the caravans would be close to the settlement, they have been located such a way that they appear physically isolated from it.
7. My attention has not been drawn to any shops or services within Easton other than a church and a very limited bus service, only operating twice a day from Monday to Friday. Furthermore, the Council advise that the nearest shops are about 5 km away and this is not disputed by the appellant. The appellant states that the occupants would visit facilities available at the works compound during the day. However, this would not be the case in the evening or during the weekends when occupiers may reasonably wish to shop or pursue leisure pursuits. I note that due to the nature of the accommodation provided occupiers may go home at weekends, but that may not always be the case nor can it be guaranteed through the planning process.
8. As a result I find that the caravans are physically and functionally isolated in the countryside due to their location and remoteness from everyday services and facilities. Occupants of the caravans are therefore largely reliant on private vehicles with limited travel choices. This also undermines the aims of paragraphs 7 and 17 of the National Planning Policy Framework's (the Framework) of locating new dwellings in rural areas close to services and facilities as a means of reducing unnecessary travel by car, with its associated carbon emissions, as one measure to cumulatively limit the effects of climate change.
9. The appellant states that existing residents travel to work at the Brampton compound for the construction of the A14 improvement works on a bicycle. This may be case in the summer months, but given the length of journey involved and the nature of the most obvious route which includes narrow, unlit roads, such an option would become unattractive in winter and during inclement weather. Even if the route along the main road were to be used this would, given the amount of traffic using the roads, not be a particularly safe and convenient option. In any case I cannot rule out the possibility of future occupants not choosing to use a bicycle.

10. Whilst I recognise that there is generally a greater reliance on the private car in more remote rural areas, it remains the case that there would be a lack of sustainable transport choices available to enable existing and future residents to conveniently access services and facilities.
11. Although the accommodation is for workers for the A14 highway improvement project I do not consider this to be special circumstances to justify the provision of isolated residential accommodation, including those cited in paragraph 55 of the Framework namely that it would be essential for a rural worker; would secure the future of a heritage asset; would re-use a redundant or disused building or would be of exceptional quality or design.
12. Even if I were to consider the caravans as providing accommodation for a rural worker, I understand that the scheme approved through the Development Consent Process of the Planning Act 2008 for the highway improvement works included details of construction compounds at Brampton and Swavesey. The approval of these compounds included the inclusion of temporary accommodation needs during the construction period and was part of the subsequent approval in May 2016. Indeed the appellant provides evidence of residential accommodation being provided for up to 150 workers at Swavesey in August 2017.
13. The appellant considers that around 800 workers will be looking for accommodation which will place pressure on the 150 places to be provided. However, I have been provided with no evidence of how the appellant reached this conclusion. The A14 Project estimates that at seasonal peak periods within the project period there are likely to be 2,500 workers. Currently around 1,500 are working on the project. Based on past experience of other projects that a cross section of the team has worked on, it is anticipated that around 20% of people working on the project will be looking for temporary accommodation. At the peak period this would equate to 500 people looking for temporary accommodation and currently only 300 some of which, in their experience would be accommodated on local established caravan parks.
14. Although I have seen evidence from the appellant to suggest that local caravan parks have no accommodation available, I have seen no substantive evidence to suggest that workers on the construction project are having difficulty in finding accommodation. I acknowledge that the appeal site may be closer to Brampton than the proposed Swavesey accommodation. Nevertheless, given that there are sites approved through the Development Consent Process which are in more accessible locations than the appeal site, then I am not satisfied that the caravans on the appeal site are essential to provide accommodation for the workers.
15. Paragraph 55 of the Framework refers to development in small villages potentially supporting services either in the immediate environment, or in a village nearby. However, I have seen no evidence to suggest that the location of the appeal site is well placed by way of public transport connectivity, to available facilities in surrounding settlements.
16. For the reasons above therefore, I conclude that the site does not represent a suitable location for the proposed development with particular regard to accessibility. It would therefore be contrary to Policies En17 and H23 of the LP, Policies CS1 and CS3 of the CS, Policies LP1 and LP17 of the Draft Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036: Stage 3 2013 (DLP) and paragraph 55 of

the Framework. As well as the requirements I have outlined above, these seek to maximise opportunities for use of public transport, walking and cycling.

Character and appearance

17. Easton forms a small village set in the open countryside. Built development is mainly linear in character along the roadside surrounded by open fields. West Farm is sited adjacent to The Lane with buildings extending some way to the rear of the site. Behind the buildings are open fields with trees and hedges forming field boundaries. The appeal site forms part of a field to the rear of West Farm which is bounded by hedges and trees. It therefore contributes positively to the open, rural character appearance of the countryside in this location. To the west of the appeal site is a public right of way.
18. The caravans are sited to the east of the field adjacent to the side hedge. As a result views of the caravans are very limited from The Lane as they are screened by the hedge and houses within the village. Nevertheless, I observed that the caravans are clearly visible from the adjacent public right of way due to their location and their stark and utilitarian appearance, at odds with the more traditional appearance of farm buildings in the locality.
19. Moreover, I observed during my site visit that touring caravans do not appear to be common features within the surrounding landscape. Nor, due to their bright colour would they be easily obscured by natural landscaping. In any case due to the temporary nature of the proposal, it is unlikely that landscaping would provide an acceptable screen within four years. As a result the caravans are incongruous, obtrusive features in the landscape. Therefore by stationing up to six caravans on the site, the visual enjoyment of the surrounding open countryside for users of the public right of way is significantly compromised.
20. While the siting of the caravans results in increased vehicular activity on the public right of way, given the nature of the work of the occupiers there is unlikely to be significant conflict during the day and therefore I am satisfied that the siting of the caravans does not detract from the quiet enjoyment of the public right of way.
21. I acknowledge that the number of caravans may vary as they are not permanently stationed on the site. Nonetheless, there is nothing to prevent there being six caravans on site at any one time.
22. For the reasons above the proposal is harmful to the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would therefore be contrary to policy CS1 of the CS, Policies LP1 and LP17 of the DLP, the Framework and guidance within the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD 2007. These require, amongst other things, that development recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and preserves and enhances local character and distinctiveness.

Highway safety

23. The highway network within the vicinity of the appeal site is mainly formed from narrow roads with no footways or street lighting. In particular The Lane has a very narrow carriageway with a limited verge of between 0.5m to 1.2m. In some places the carriageway width reduces to 2.8 m, restricting forward visibility. Limited passing places are available.

24. The highway authority suggest, using The Trip Rate Information Computer System (TRICS) and the likely number of existing houses using The Lane, that there would be about 128 existing vehicle movements per day with an additional 24 per day generated by the caravans.
25. The carriageway is narrow along The Lanes and the lack of footway means that there is potential for conflict with pedestrians. However, I have already found that the isolated location of the village and the lack of services mean that it is unlikely that there would be a significant number of pedestrians using the roads in the village. In addition, the restricted width of the carriageway helps to reduce the speed of traffic using the road. Furthermore, I note that the highway authority confirm that there has been no record of any injury accidents since 2006. Moreover, In this instance, given the particular working patterns of the occupiers, and the fact that the caravans are unlikely to be occupied by families, it is probable that traffic movements are low. As a result therefore, I am not persuaded that the addition of such a limited number of traffic movements per day would be materially harmful to the safe use of the highway in this case.
26. For the reasons above, I conclude that the proposal would not be harmful to highway safety. There would therefore be no conflict with Policy LP17 of the DLP and the Framework. These require, amongst other things, that adverse effects of traffic movements are minimised and that safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people.

Other matters

27. Both West Farm and Carrick Cottage, adjacent to the public right of way that provides access to the development are listed buildings grade II. The Council consider that the caravans are sited a sufficient distance from both buildings to have no impact on the setting of the listed buildings. I saw nothing on site which would lead me to a different conclusion.
28. The appellant refers to two other sites which he believes are operating, without planning permission for the provision of caravans for workers on the A14 road improvement scheme (A14 near Ellington and near Hilton Cambridgeshire). He states these are located away from the A14 and one has poor access. In addition, the appellant also refers to two caravan sites at Grafham and Brampton which are developed outside of village boundaries. However I do not know the precise details of the sites referred to and cannot be sure that they represent a direct parallel to the caravans the subject of this appeal. In any case I have determined the appeal based on its own merits.
29. The appellant considers that the siting of the caravans meets the requirements of Policies H30 and H22 of the LP regarding the extension to commercial areas uses within existing residential areas and the loss of high quality agricultural land respectively. However, I note that these issues are not disputed by the Council and were not a reason for refusal.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

30. I have found that Policies En17 and H23 of the Local Plan and Policy CS3 of the CS cannot be considered up-to-date. In these circumstances, and in relation to decision taking, paragraph 14 of the Framework advises that permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and

demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, or specified policies in the Framework indicate that development should be restricted.

31. The appellant states that the proposal is intended to temporarily diversify and support the income of West Farm supporting a local business. However, I do not consider that the provision of additional residential accommodation is essential to the efficient operation of the farm as required by Policy En17 of the LP. While the Framework supports a prosperous rural economy through the diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses, it also seeks to avoid isolated residential accommodation in the open countryside. I therefore give limited weight to the benefits of diversification.
32. The appellant states that the caravans are being used by workers for the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon road improvement scheme which in my opinion could reasonably be controlled by a condition. The accommodation would therefore support a local improvement scheme which is likely to bring economic benefits to the local area. However, I have found that the site is not in an accessible location to accommodate the caravans. Furthermore, I have seen no substantive evidence to demonstrate a need for the caravans. Furthermore, I have found that the caravans are harmful to the character and appearance of the area. As a result the proposal would not accord with the social and environmental roles of planning and I give this considerable weight in my decision.
33. Although the proposal is not harmful to highway safety, this is a pre-requisite of good planning and therefore is neutral in the planning balance.
34. All in all, I consider that the totality of the harm that would be a consequence of the significant adverse impacts I have identified would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the limited benefits referred to above when assessed against the policies in the Framework when taken as a whole. Therefore, the proposal does not constitute sustainable development for which the Framework carries a presumption in favour. For this reason, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Zoe Raygen

INSPECTOR