



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 March 2019

by Ben Plenty BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 July 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/K0235/W/18/3216146

Treize, Cranfield Road, Wootton Green, Bedford MK43 9EA

- 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 Roger Skipper against the decision of Bedford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 18/02259/FUL, dated 29 August 2018, was refused by notice dated 23 October 2018.
 - The development proposed is erection of detached single storey dwellinghouse following the demolition of a car port to existing bungalow.
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This decision is issued in accordance with Section 56(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and supersedes the decision issued on 23 April 2019.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - i) whether the proposed dwelling would result in a sustainable pattern and form of development, having regard to local and national policy, and
 - ii) the effect of the proposed dwelling on the character and appearance of the area.

Procedural Matters

3. The Council has identified that the reason for refusal incorrectly referred to Policy CP14 (development outside the growth area) of the Core Strategy & Rural Issues Plan 2008 (CSRIP). It had meant to refer to Policy CP3, which I will therefore consider instead. The appellants have had the opportunity to comment on this revised position. As such I do not consider any party has been prejudiced by this change in policy circumstances.
4. The draft Bedford Borough Council Local Plan was submitted for Examination in December 2018. The Council has not identified any specifically relevant policy from the emerging plan. In any event, as this has been subject to extensive objection, I shall afford it limited weight.

Reasons

Sustainable pattern

5. The site and surrounds are within the 'Growth Area' identified by the CSRIP. However, the site is outside of Wootton which has a defined Settlement Policy Area (SPA). Policy CP3 of the CSRIP, identifies that growth will occur within i) the urban area boundary, and ii) the defined limits of Growth Area key service centres. Policy CP13 of the CSRIP, states that all land outside SPA's is defined as countryside. The Policy also states that development will only be permitted in the countryside if it complies with national policy. This approach is generally consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework), which seeks to boost the delivery of rural housing, but also protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
6. The appeal site is in a small ribbon of residential development in an otherwise open area of countryside. It is accessed from an unlit private driveway around 120 metres long and which connects to Cranfield Road. The site is approximately 250 metres from the recently expanded Wootton boundary. It is also around 500 metres from Wootton Green which is a small settlement with very limited services. Cranfield Road has no pavements or streetlights, travelling north to Wootton. Wootton is larger and as a 'key service centre' offers various facilities and services. The Framework recognises that public transport opportunities will vary from urban to rural areas. However only a limited bus service is provided on Cranfield Road connecting Bedford and Milton Keynes. Moreover, whilst pedestrian and cycling linkages may improve in the future, Cranfield Road currently presents an unattractive option for walking or cycling due to the speed of the road and lack of pavements. As such, the site provides limited alternatives for access by means other than for car borne travel.
7. The new housing development, under construction, has extended the Wootton boundary to within around 250 metres of the appeal site. The submitted layout plan indicates that a footway would continue beyond the estate boundary towards the site. Also, a new cycle path is proposed within the Marston Vale growth area, along Cranfield Road. However, I do not have full details of these infrastructure improvements or certainty regarding their delivery timeframes. Furthermore, whilst these measures would slightly improve the connectivity of the site, they would not result in a significant change in its rural character or accessibility. As such, these improvements would have only a limited bearing in favour of the proposal.
8. Although the Council considers the site to be isolated, the Braintree case¹ considers that "isolated" should be given its ordinary objective meaning of "far away from other places, buildings or people; remote". Given the proximity of existing residential properties, the new dwelling would not be far away from other buildings or people, and so would not be isolated in terms of paragraph 79 of the Framework. Consequently, paragraphs 77-78 of the Framework apply. These objectives seek to promote sustainable development in rural areas where housing would provide affordable housing to meet local needs, enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities, and where it would support local services.
9. The appellants state that they intend to live in the proposed dwelling, that its construction would generate employment and that it would increase local spending. The appellants also state that the proposal is for a single storey

dwelling, which is relatively uncommon in new housing development. Furthermore, the proposal would also result in the existing dwelling being released on the open market. However, these benefits would make only a limited contribution towards the vitality of the local rural community or local services. Furthermore, as occupants would be most likely to travel to and from the site by car, they would then be likely to travel some distance for services, bypassing local smaller settlements.

10. Being located outside of the settlement boundary of Wootton and with poor accessibility, the proposal would not accord with the spatial strategy of the development plan. As such the proposal would be contrary to Policy CP3 and CP13 of the CSRIP, which seek amongst other things to direct development to defined areas of growth and restrict development in the countryside. The proposal would also not accord with the Framework which seeks to boost housing in rural areas that would enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.
11. Policy H26 of the Bedford Borough Local Plan (LP) restricts development in the open countryside. This has been found to be inconsistent with the Framework by the decisions of two recent Inspectors, at Brook Farm¹ in 2016 and Keeley Lane² in 2017. I agree that Policy H26 is inconsistent with the Framework and should only apply to truly isolated sites. Consequently, I have afforded only moderate weight to Saved Policy H26. However, having found conflict with the settlement hierarchical objectives of the development plan, this has had a limited bearing on my conclusion.

Character and appearance

12. The appeal site is in a side garden of a detached dwelling. The site is accessed from a private drive and adjacent to other detached dwellings on large plots with space around them. The surrounding countryside is open and the adjacent land mostly flat. Some boundary planting would partially obscure views of the site, but it is nevertheless relatively exposed. The site makes a positive contribution to the openness of the surrounding countryside.
13. The proposal would be slightly taller than the existing dwelling. The design would generally complement the style of local dwellings. However, the plot would be substantially smaller than most adjacent properties. Furthermore, it would also only retain a limited gap to the existing dwelling. Consequently, the proposal would be read as part of the built form of the existing dwelling, resulting in the perception of a single larger mass. The proposal would also crowd the existing dwelling and reduce the spacious character of the grouping, even if it meets the Council's minimum space standards. This would result in a cramped form of development that would be harmful to the character of the open countryside. Although the Framework seeks to promote the effective use of land, development must still be sympathetic to the character of the area. Subsequently, the proposal would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area.
14. Therefore, the proposal would not accord with Policy CP21 of the CSRIP, which seeks development to be of the highest quality and fully consider its context. The proposal would also fail to satisfy saved Policies BE29, BE30 and BE37 of

¹ Planning decision reference: APP/K0235/W/16/3156635

² Planning decision reference: APP/K0235/W/17/3174147

the LP, which seek amongst other things to promote good design, have regard to context and resist development that bears little relationship to the character of its surroundings. The proposal would also be contrary to the Council's design guide 2000³, which amongst other things, requires development to harmonise with the street, to carefully consider the grouping and relationship to existing dwellings and to preserve the open quality of external spaces.

Other Matters

15. The appellants have also identified that the proposal would have no material adverse impact on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. However, an absence of harm in this respect can only be considered as a neutral factor in the planning balance and does not outweigh the conflict I have found with the relevant planning policies.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

16. The proposed site is not an isolated location but is within a small ribbon of development in the open countryside. The proposal would not materially contribute towards the vitality of local rural settlements and would have with limited access to local services or public transport. It would also fail to respond positively to its context. The proposed development would therefore not accord with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations which outweigh this finding. Therefore, for the reasons given and, having considered all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Ben Plenty

INSPECTOR

³ Residential Extensions, New Dwellings & small infill Development, Design Guidance 2000