



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 May 2019

by Sian Griffiths BSc(Hons) DipTP MScRealEst MRTPI MRICS

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 July 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/K0235/W/19/3220852

Land to rear of 14-20 Northhill Road, Cople MK44 3TU

- 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 & Mrs Moss; The Shuttleworth Trust; Mrs S Mousley; Mrs N Parrish, and Mr & Mrs C Porter against the decision of Bedford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 18/02455/OUT, dated 4 September 2018, was refused by notice dated 26 November 2018.
 - The development proposed is outline application for the erection of 7 dwellings with access from Northhill Road and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have included the complete list of appellants' names provided by the appellant's agent, instead of 'the owners of' as set out in the application and appeal forms. This is for the purposes of clarity.
3. A proposed site plan together with other illustrative material has also been provided. However, with the exception of the site access, the details shown on the additional particulars are not being considered at the outline stage. I have therefore treated these drawings as being indicative, to show a possible way of developing the site.
4. Since the submission of the appeal, an updated version of the National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) (the Framework) has been published by the Government. This is a material consideration in planning decisions. In relation to the main issue in this appeal, Government policy has not materially changed, and it was not therefore necessary to invite any further comments from the different parties involved.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are the impacts on the character and appearance of the area where it relates to:
 - the proposed quantum of development, and
 - the impact on the setting of non-designated heritage assets.

Reasons

Character and Appearance – proposed quantum of development

6. Cople is a small, historic village which has grown in a linear fashion along Willington Road and Northhill Road. The area of Northhill Road next to the appeal site is characterised by small terraced blocks of what are referred to as Duke of Bedford cottages, which are non-designated heritage assets. There are two such blocks of 4 cottages flanking the proposed access to the appeal site, which comprises garden land associated with one block of cottages (No's 14-20). The spaciousness of the gardens and separation between blocks gives an informal and pastoral feel to this part of the village.
7. The appeal site itself comprises garden land which has become overgrown with low level vegetation. There are a small number of garage structures on the site serving No's 14-20, which are accessed via a track from Northhill Road. The appeal site is flanked by side garden areas serving other properties fronting Northhill Road. Beyond the appeal site to the south west are open agricultural fields.
8. The development of the appeal site would result in a backland form of development that would be at odds with the established settlement pattern along this part of Northhill Road. The Council consider that the principle of the development is in accordance with policies CP12 and CP14 of the Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan (2008) (CS). These policies seek to differentiate between settlements and the countryside, supporting additional development in Settlement Policy Areas (SPAs) such as Cople where it is required to meet local business and community needs and to maintain the vitality of such communities. However, there is a difference between this and development being acceptable on specific sites.
9. The appellant also argues that the proposal is consistent with the requirements of the Framework to increase the supply of housing. Whilst this may be the case, increasing the supply of housing is not an objective to be pursued at any cost and in the absence of any evidence that there is a severe shortfall, the modest contribution from the development has little weight and certainly does not outweigh the other harm that would result.
10. I have considered the appeal decisions¹ highlighted by the appellants, where they draw parallels with these appeal proposals in relation to development density. However, these appeal sites are in other areas and I do not have full details that led to these proposals being accepted. In any case, I have determined this appeal on its own merits.
11. Even though the overall density of the proposals would be around 21 dwellings per hectare, within the context of the surrounding area it would be substantially more dense, leading to an urbanised appearance in what is a much more open area adjacent to open countryside, behind the strongly linear form of this part of the village. Whilst the proposed layout is indicative at this stage, I am unconvinced that the site could therefore accommodate this quantum of development, without resulting in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area.

¹ APP/L3625/W/18/3200006 and APP/F1040/W/18/3207248

12. I therefore find such harm would result in conflict with saved policies BE30, BE37 and H38 of the Bedford Local Plan (2002) (LP) as well as policy CP21 of the CS which seek to protect established character and local distinctiveness and prevent overdevelopment.

Character and Appearance – impact on setting of non-designated heritage assets

13. The Duke of Bedford cottages, as non-designated heritage assets, positively contribute to the unique historic and rural character of this part of the village. The layout of these cottages is such that the gaps between the terraced blocks is a strong characteristic, offering views to the garden land beyond the cottages. Although the layout could change at reserved matters stage, given the size of the site and the quantum of development proposed, I consider it likely that the development of 7 dwellings would result in development appearing within the visual gap between the two blocks of cottages that flank the proposed entrance. I consider this would undermine the open, spacious settings of the cottages, thereby harming their significance as non-designated heritage assets and I afford this moderate weight.
14. The addition of an access road (designed to an adoptable standard) into the appeal site would be a significantly urbanising feature, in contrast with the existing track. I note the appellants' contention that the design of the road could be considered in more detail. However, whilst this would apply to the internal road layout, access is not a reserved matter. The proposed access plan (Ref A 32503 08A) shows a carriageway with separate footway and service easement leading into the site. This would therefore be significantly wider than the existing track and this too would also be harmful to the significance of the Duke of Bedford cottages, eroding the informal feel of the gardens between the cottages. I also give this moderate weight.
15. There would be economic benefits associated with the construction of 7 new dwellings, along with benefits associated with their future occupation. There would be some social benefits arising from additional housing choice within the village. Given the small scale of the scheme, I attach moderate weight to these benefits.
16. The appellants state that the site is currently overgrown and detracts from the character and appearance of the area, however, I do not agree that this is harmful *per se*, given that the site forms part of the transition between the established linear development in this part of the village and the open countryside beyond. I therefore afford the clearance of the site for development neutral weight in the overall balance.
17. The benefits set out above do not therefore outweigh the harm I have identified to the character and appearance of the area as a result of the quantum of development, nor the harm to the non-designated heritage assets, which would be significant and lasting.
18. I therefore find conflict with policies CP21 of the CS and policy CP23 of the CS which seeks development that protects and enhances heritage assets. I also find conflict with paragraph 197 of the Framework, which also seeks a balanced judgement when considering the impact of harm to the significance of non-designated heritage assets.

Conclusion

19. Having regard to all matters raised, I therefore conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

Sian Griffiths

INSPECTOR