
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 July 2019

by M Harris BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 August 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/H3320/W/19/3228014

Combe Hayes, Taunton Road, Bicknoller TA4 4HE

- 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 A King against the decision of West Somerset Council.
 - The application Ref 3/01/18/007, dated 15 May 2018, was refused by notice dated 12 February 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as "this application seeks outline consent (access only) for the erection of two dwellings".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The application was in outline with all matters other than access reserved for future consideration. A proposed site plan was provided indicating how two 3-bedroom detached dwellings with garages, parking and a turning area could be accommodated on the site. I have had regard to this in reaching my decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - i. whether or not the site is an appropriate location for residential development having regard to local and national policy for the delivery of housing; and
 - ii. the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the rural area.

Reasons

Location of development

4. The appeal site is located approximately 200 metres beyond the built-up area of Bicknoller. It is identified within the settlement hierarchy set out in Policy SC1 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032, adopted November 2016 (Local Plan) as a primary village and offers a range of services and facilities, including a shop, pub and church.
5. The Council's wider strategy is to focus development within the main centres in recognition that these are the more sustainable locations with the necessary

- services and facilities to support residents. The approach also serves to protect the areas of open countryside.
6. In settlements such as Bicknoller the strategy seeks to ensure that development is sited within or in close proximity (defined as 50 metres) to the contiguous built-up area. The basis of this strategy is to ensure that development can appropriately support those services and facilities within the settlements, in part through ensuring that there is safe and easy pedestrian access to them. The Council's approach reflects the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) insofar as it expects development to be centred on appropriate locations and in doing so to limit the need for travel by private car by promoting the use of sustainable modes of transport.
 7. As a result of the location beyond the 50-metre buffer, for the purposes of planning policy the site is within the open countryside, as defined by Policy OC1 of the Local Plan where development will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, including, but not limited to provision for rural workers and meeting identified local housing needs.
 8. Whilst the proposed dwellings would infill the gap between existing properties, irrespective of this there is nothing before me to indicate that the proposal falls within the exceptional circumstances set out in Policy OC1. As a result, it is my assessment that the site is located within open countryside where development is not permitted except for in those circumstances.
 9. Turning to the facilities and services in Bicknoller, these are some distance from the appeal site. The evidence indicates that the community shop on Honey Row Lane is over 900 metres from the site along narrow, hedge lined rural roads (including Dashwoods Lane and Church Lane) which lack footway provision and street lighting. Prior to reaching these roads, it would be necessary to cross the A358 which has no pedestrian refuge to facilitate safe crossing. Whilst there is an ability to use the footway along the A358 to reach a bus stop, the evidence indicates that the frequency of services is limited.
 10. Whilst I note that there was no objection to the proposal on highway safety grounds, the nature of the local circumstances is such that in my planning judgement I do not consider it likely that future occupiers of the proposed dwellings would walk or cycle to the village, particularly if they were less mobile or during periods of inclement weather. It is my conclusion that the aim to reduce the reliance on the private car is not supported by this proposal.
 11. For these reasons, the site is not an appropriate location for residential development. It would fail to comply with Policy OC1 of the Local Plan which seeks to resist development in the countryside in the absence of exceptional circumstances. It would also conflict with Policies SC1: 4A and 4B insofar as they require development to be well related to existing services and facilities and for there to be safe and easy pedestrian access to them.

Character and appearance

12. The proposed dwellings would be sited between the host property and a terrace of residential dwellings, accessed via a short stretch of elevated highway running parallel to the A358. There is existing vegetation on the site boundary and between the A358 and layby.

13. The existing properties fall outside of the contiguous built-up area of Bicknoller and are visually distinct from the village by virtue of the tree and hedge lined edges to the highways. In policy terms, as noted above, the location falls within open countryside.
14. Beyond the site along the A358, development is limited to individual dwellings or farmsteads and ribbons of a small number of dwellings separated by agricultural fields, all of which contribute to the open, undeveloped setting of the landscape.
15. Whilst limited to two proposed dwellings, the introduction of buildings in this location would erode the low density, rural pattern of development and by virtue of developing within the existing gap between the properties would result in an intensification of development.
16. For these reasons, the proposals would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the rural area and fail to complement the environment and character of the existing settlement. This would be contrary to Local Plan Policies OC1 regarding protecting the countryside from development unless it is serving a specific purpose relating to rural/tourism businesses or meeting affordable housing needs and SC1 4C in respect of ensuring that development compliments the character of existing settlements.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons set out above, the appeal is dismissed.

M Harris

INSPECTOR