



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 August 2019

by David Spencer BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 3 September 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/L2630/W/19/3226079

Land south of water treatment works, Norwich Road, Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk.

- 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 & Mrs D Baldwin against the decision of South Norfolk Council.
 - The application Ref 2018/2698, dated 4 December 2018, was refused by notice dated 29 January 2019.
 - The development proposed is construction of a self-build Eco dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The address in the decision banner is taken from the Local Planning Authority's (LPA) decision notice. It is the same address on the appellant's appeal form. I am satisfied that the appeal site can be readily identified from this address.

Main Issues

3. There are two main issues:
 - (i) Whether or not the proposal would result in isolated and unsustainably located new housing in the countryside; and
 - (ii) The effect of the proposed dwelling and landscaping on the character and appearance of the surrounding rural area.

Reasons

Sustainability of Location

4. The appeal site is in countryside. Whilst there are two dwellings (Glenbrook and Tas House) a short distance to the north and a solitary dwelling to the south closer to the very small village of Caistor St Edmund, there is no discernible clustering of settlement at the appeal location. Neither the nearby quarry operation or the adjacent low-profile water treatment works provide any palpable sense of a rural community or settlement at the appeal location.
5. The nearest settlements are at Caistor St Edmund and the southern fringes of Norwich at Lakenham and Trowse. Caistor St Edmund is within walking distance but there are scant services and no footway along the connecting Stoke Road. Whilst my site visit can only represent a snap shot, I observed

that Stoke Road is an appreciably busy rural road. There are very few places to safely step off, where traffic can operate at the national speed limit within a sinuous alignment. It would be an unpleasant walk, such that future occupants would be highly unlikely to regularly walk to Caistor St Edmund.

6. Both Lakenham and Trowse, and Norwich more generally, are beyond a reasonable walking distance and again, there is no continuous footway or street lighting from the appeal site to these locations. The southern edge of Norwich is within a reasonable cycling distance although the relatively busy roads, combined with the narrow railway over-bridge and bends near Long John Hill, would deter all but the most confident cyclist. It is very difficult to envisage future occupants of the dwelling regularly cycling into Norwich.
7. Consequently, future occupants of the appeal proposal would be distant from services and facilities and so would be heavily reliant on the use of the private car. A reference is made to home-working but this may not necessarily be the outcome or reasonably secured over the lifetime of the dwelling. The proposed dwelling would be unsustainably located and it would be isolated.
8. Paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) countenances isolated dwellings in the countryside where they meet particular circumstances. Whilst the appeal proposal would be of a striking contemporary design and very energy efficient this would not be unique or particularly pioneering. It would not be the truly outstanding or innovative design of exceptional quality required by paragraph 79. Nor would it, by developing part of what is currently a characteristically open valley-side field, significantly enhance its immediate setting.
9. I therefore conclude that the appeal proposal would be an isolated dwelling in the countryside and unsustainably located resulting in a harmfully heavy reliance on the use of the private car. This harm would not be off-set by the environmental credentials of the proposed dwelling. The proposal would not comprise the sustainably located development sought by Policy DM1.3 of the South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies Document 2015 (the DMPD). The high reliance on the private car would be contrary to Policy 1 of the Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk 2014 (the JCS) and DMPD Policy 3.10. Both policies seek to reduce the need to travel and to maximise the use of sustainable forms of transport appropriate to the location within the wider ambit of responding to the challenge of climate change. Furthermore, it would not meet the requirements of NPPF paragraph 79 for an isolated rural dwelling.

Rural Character

10. I share the assessment of the appellant's Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) that the appeal site is located at a point of transition between the valley floor of the River Tas and the gently undulating farmland of the wider valley, rising to the east. Notwithstanding the presence of the nearby A47 Norwich Southern Bypass, pylons and the quarry to the north, the overriding character of the appeal location is the openness of the Tas valley and the dispersed smattering of only very occasional development away from the clustered form of the valley villages.
11. The appeal site, being perceptibly part of a larger field, is inherently part of the wider fabric of the open and sparsely settled Tas valley. This can be

- experienced from within Stoke Road around the appeal site, from the public footpath immediately to the south of the appeal site and in wider views across the Tas valley from the Markshall Farm Road and beyond. Whilst I accept landscaping around the quarry and the water works masks views into the site from the north it is otherwise clearly an open valley-side site in all other perspectives. Given the scale, massing and materials of the appeal proposal including the height of the split dual pitch roof, the large areas of proposed first floor glazing for solar gain and the potential for appreciable areas of photo-voltaic panelling on the roof the dwelling would be starkly conspicuous.
12. I accept that existing hedging and young trees at the site frontage on Stoke Road, augmented by further planting within the site would limit immediate views for passing traffic along this road. However, the degree of landscaping necessary would significantly enclose the site. The sense of openness experienced from within Stoke Road and from the adjoining public footpath across farmland fields would be palpably eroded at the appeal location. As such I share the LPAs concerns that the degree of landscaping would harmfully affect the open countryside character. I observed the degree of landscaping around the quarry and water works but this is in contrast to the openness of the Tas valley. As such I am not persuaded it should set the pattern for development at this location.
13. Furthermore, the proposed landscaping would take a considerable time to sufficiently filter views of the sizeable building such that the harmful presence of an incongruously isolated dwelling in the countryside would be experienced for some intervening time. Notwithstanding the cutting of the building into the valley slope the overall height and massing of the building would remain significant. Accordingly, despite the proposed degree of landscaping there would be a residual visual presence of the building in wider views across the Tas valley and from the adjoining public footpath. As set out above, development is particularly scattered and sparse in this part of the Tas valley and the appeal proposal would set an undesirable precedent for harmful consolidation and loss of openness. This would be contrary to the landscape guidelines for this area which advise of the need ensure the rural character adjacent to the southern bypass is maintained and to sensitively manage development that could cumulatively erode the local rural character.
14. I therefore conclude that the proposed dwelling and landscaping would have a significantly harmful effect on the rural character of the surrounding rural area. The proposal would be contrary to DMPD Policies DM1.4(d) and DM3.8 which require, amongst other things, that development makes a positive contribution to local character, enhances the environment and is successfully integrated into its context. In particular, it would be contrary to DMPD Policy DM4.5 which requires all development to respect, conserve and where possible, enhance the landscape character of its immediate and wider environment, especially in identified rural river valleys (such as the Tas).

Planning Balance and conclusions

15. At the time the LPA made its decision it recognised it could only demonstrate a 4.61 year supply for the Norwich Policy Area (NPA) in JCS. As part of the appeal, the LPA has submitted a draft Housing Land Supply Statement (dated 12 April 2019) for the period 2018/19 to 2023/24. The appellant has had an opportunity to comment on this latest evidence which is grounded in the

content of the latest NPPF and recent Planning Practice Guidance and applies both the recent Local Housing Need (LHN) and the measurement of performance in the government's Housing Delivery Test (HDT). The HDT amalgamates the three Greater Norwich authorities to produce one composite measure rather than disaggregate performance over the now dated policy areas in the JCS. Recent performance has been buoyant at 133% such that against the LHN, and applying only a 5% buffer, it is submitted that there is now a 6.63 year supply of housing land.

16. The appellant states that as a draft statement yet to be formally endorsed only limited weight should be given. It is nonetheless, the most comprehensive evidence before me and is logical in its approach in applying the latest LHN and HDT inputs. I ascribe considerable weight to the statement such that I conclude that a five-year supply of deliverable housing land has been demonstrated. Consequently, the policies most important for determining the proposal remain up-to-date.
17. The appellant asserts that the development plan is silent on self-build and as such by virtue of having no relevant development plan policies the tilted balance at paragraph 11(d) is engaged. This is a moot point as I am not aware that the general policy framework in either the JCS or DMPD precludes the wide variety of opportunities for sustainably located self-build. Nonetheless, I attach moderate weight to the high environmental performance of the proposed dwelling and to the biodiversity benefits that would accrue from the proposed landscaping and waterbody. As a single dwelling it would be sort of development likely to be delivered by small scale builders or on a self-build basis. However, given the healthy housing land supply, which invariably would include smaller sites, I give this benefit very little weight. Cumulatively, these benefits would not outweigh the significant environmental and social harms that would arise from an isolated dwelling in the countryside.
18. Consequently, the proposal would not amount to sustainable development for which there is a presumption for at paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF. Overall, for the reasons given above, the proposal would be contrary to up-to-date development plan policies. There are no material considerations that warrant a decision other than in accordance with the development plan and I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

David Spencer

Inspector.