
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 September 2019

by R Norman BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4 October 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/L2630/W/19/3224544
Common Lane, Fritton, Norwich NR15 2QW

- 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 William Sargent, H P & B K Sargent against the decision of South Norfolk District Council.
 - The application Ref 2018/2096, dated 20 September 2018, was refused by notice dated 13 November 2018.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 2 detached dwellings with cart-shed and associated external works.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - Whether the development would be in an appropriate location for new housing;
 - The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - The effect of the development on the setting of the nearby Listed Buildings and whether it would preserve or enhance the Fritton Conservation Area.

Reasons

Appropriate Location for Housing

3. The appeal site is located on Common Lane and currently comprises a rectangular area of grassed land. There is an existing access into the site and there are mature trees to the front boundary of the site. Either side of the site are existing dwellings and the wider area is characterised by open countryside and fields.
4. The proposed development would introduce two detached dwellings into the site. They would be set either side of the access point and would each have separate parking facilities. Each would be served by reasonably large areas of private garden.

5. The appeal site is remote from the nearby settlements. Policy DM 1.3 of the South Norfolk Local Plan (2015) (Local Plan) seeks to locate new development so that it positively contributes to the sustainable development of the district. It goes on to state that development in the countryside, outside of the defined development boundaries, will only be permitted where allowed by specific development management policies or where there are overriding benefits in terms of economic social and environmental dimensions.
6. Fritton has limited services and facilities and it would appear that future occupiers of the development would rely on the settlement of Long Stratton to meet their initial day to day needs. The Appellant states that Long Stratton is located approximately 2 miles away from the appeal site. Access to Long Stratton is predominantly along rural roads which offer little in the way of pedestrian facilities. In addition, the distance between the appeal site and the facilities in Long Stratton would be likely to discourage walking.
7. The Appellant has identified a network of public rights of way throughout the surrounding countryside which provide a link to Long Stratton. However, it appears that many of these consist of rural byways and are somewhat uneven and unmade with routes through the surrounding fields. I find that this would mean that pedestrians wanting to access local services and facilities would be more inclined to go by car as a result of the condition, lack of lighting and routes of many of these footpaths, particularly during the winter months and inclement weather.
8. The road outside of the appeal site is similarly without a formal footpath and has a lack of street lighting. Accordingly, I find that it has not been sufficiently demonstrated that there would be suitable pedestrian and cycle facilities to link the appeal site with the nearest services and facilities and there would therefore be a high likelihood of reliance on the private car for many day to day journeys.
9. There is some dispute over the status of the Shelton with Hardwick Community School, which is located a reasonable distance from the appeal site. It has been identified for potential closure due to lack of student numbers however the current status has not been confirmed to me. Should the school close this would require future occupiers to travel further. However, even if the school were to remain open, I find that as a result of the distance and lack of formal pedestrian facilities, it would be likely that the school would be accessed via private car.
10. I note the information regarding the Borderhoppa dial-a-ride service which could be utilised to provide an additional transport option. However, this represents a limited alternative option and is not sufficient to outweigh the above considerations in respect of the accessibility of the site.
11. The Appellant has detailed the economic benefits of the development, namely that future occupiers would spend locally and there would be employment generated through the construction period. Whilst these would represent positive aspects, the limited nature of the development, for two dwellings, would only result in a modest contribution in this regard which would not be sufficient to outweigh the policy conflict in this instance.
12. The proposed development therefore fails to comply with Policies DM 1.3 and DM 3.10 of the South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies

Document (2015) (DMP). Collectively these seek to direct development to sustainable locations, restrict development in the countryside to those supported by specific development management policies or where there are overriding social, economic and environmental benefits and seek to ensure that development is supported by sustainable forms of transport. It would also fail to accord with the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) (the Framework) insofar as it requires rural housing to be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities, provide appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes and achieve sustainable development.

Character and Appearance

13. The appeal site is set within a rural landscape characterised predominantly by open views, mature landscaping and sporadic dwellings. To the north there are existing properties in a more compact arrangement. However, this part of the road hosts few properties with substantial spacing between them which makes a positive contribution to the rural charm of the surroundings.
14. The proposed development would introduce two reasonably large dwellings into the existing landscape. This would result in the consolidation of the built form along this part of the road and would erode the openness of the surroundings. The existing properties have substantial spacing between them and whilst a relatively large gap would be retained between the appeal properties and the nearby dwellings, the two proposed dwellings would be reasonably close to one another and the introduction of two properties into the site would significantly reduce the sporadic and spacious arrangement of properties along this part of the road.
15. I note that the Appellant has identified that the site has previously been occupied by buildings, including a cottage and farmhouse group, the latter of which the Appellant advises was demolished recently. Whilst this may have been the case, the appeal site in its current form is undeveloped with little evidence of previous buildings apparent. Consequently, notwithstanding the previous form of the site, it currently contributes to the open, rural character of the immediate surroundings. Whilst the proposed development may replicate the historic form and development of the previous buildings on site, this is not sufficient to outweigh the harm to the rural character that would arise now in the change from an open, rural site to one which consolidates the development along this part of the road.
16. Accordingly, I find that the proposed development would harm the rural character and appearance of the area for the above reasons. As such, it would fail to comply with Policies DM 3.8 and DM 4.5 of the DMP. These require development to achieve high quality design which protects and enhances the existing locally distinctive character and landscape character, amongst other things.

Listed Buildings and Conservation Area

17. The appeal site is flanked to either side by existing properties, Oak Tree Cottage and Malthouse Farm, which are Grade II Listed Buildings and comprise traditional, timber framed cottages and farmhouses. The site is also located within the Fritton Conservation Area, a large part of which covers the Fritton Common area and the rural landscape.

18. The Listed Buildings are set within relatively spacious sites and the surrounding countryside ensures that they have a strong visual connection with the rural landscape. Whilst there may have been buildings on the appeal site previously, the current character of this part of the Conservation Area is of dispersed and sporadic properties which contribute to the visual character of the open countryside. The traditional nature of the properties is enhanced by the spaciousness of the surroundings, with only mature landscaping offering any form of enclosure.
19. Although the proposed dwellings would be set at a reasonable distance from the existing properties, they nevertheless would be highly visible in relation to the setting of the Listed Buildings and would be seen from a number of angles against the existing properties. The proposed development would significantly reduce the spacing between the properties and would therefore harm the setting of the Listed Buildings in terms of their visual connection with the rural surroundings.
20. Whilst this harm would be less than substantial Policy DM 4.10 of the DMP and the Framework requires this to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimal viable use (paragraph 196). The Appellant has identified benefits in terms of the generation of employment and impact on local facilities, the provision of new housing and the replication of the historic grouping of buildings. However, these do not collectively outweigh the harm identified in respect of the impact on the Listed Buildings and character and appearance of the area and Conservation Area identified above.
21. The proposal would therefore fail to comply with Policies DM 4.10 of the DMP, Section 16 of the Framework and Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which seek to ensure that development proposals have regard to the historic environment and places considerable importance and weight to preserving listed buildings, their settings and the character and appearance of conservation areas.

Other Matters

22. The Appellant considers that the Council can only demonstrate a 4.38 year supply of housing land. However, the Council have demonstrated that they have a housing land supply of 6.63 years following the publication of the Interim Greater Norwich Area Housing Land Supply Assessment. Nevertheless, in the event that I found there to be a shortfall in the Council's Housing Land Supply the addition of two new homes would make a very limited contribution to this and would not be sufficient to outweigh the harm identified above.
23. I have had regard to Paragraphs 68 and 79 of the Framework and Section 143 of the Localism Act (2011) which consider the opportunities for bringing forward small and medium sized sites and avoiding isolated homes. However, whilst this development would make a small contribution to the local economy, supply of housing and is not physically isolated from other buildings, these would not be sufficient to outweigh the adverse impacts of the proposal.

Conclusion

24. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

R Norman

INSPECTOR