
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 September 2019

by C L Humphrey BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7th October 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/19/3227761

Blue House Farm, Blue House Farm Road, Netherton Colliery NE22 6BD

- 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 Rabinder Bariana against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 17/04451/OUT, dated 7 December 2017, was refused by notice dated 22 November 2018.
 - The development proposed is 11no. detached 2 storey dwellings with associated access works and removal of trees.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs, made by Mr Rabinder Bariana against Northumberland County Council, is the subject of a separate Decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are whether the proposed development would:
 - a) preserve the setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which the adjacent Grade II listed building possesses;
 - b) be in a suitable location for housing, having regard to the accessibility of services; and
 - c) make adequate provision for parking.

Reasons

Listed Building

4. The significance of the early 18th Century Grade II listed Blue House Farm partly lies in its considerable age and in the historic fabric and architectural features of the main south facing frontage. This is the focus of the view from the west along the driveway, the entrance to which is marked by an imposing stone pier. Significance is also derived from the building's historic association with the remaining former farm buildings to the east and the rural, agricultural landscape in which it is located. The undeveloped land historically associated with Blue House Farm comprises its setting and contributes to the significance and special interest of the listed building.

5. The functional role of Blue House Farm and the associated land and buildings have clearly evolved over time. However, notwithstanding incremental urban encroachment to the east, the appeal site and surrounding paddocks have remained open and largely devoid of permanent, urbanising structures. Thus, they continue to provide an important link to the building's agricultural origins.
6. Historic mapping and photographs provided in the Heritage Statement submitted with the appeal indicate there was previously an extensive range of associated farm buildings. However, based on this evidence, these appear to have been subordinate structures set to the sides and rear of the main house and arranged in a tight courtyard formation which had a clear physical and functional relationship with the farm.
7. Land north of Blue House Farm Road appears to have been open in the past, as has the land north of the driveway leading to the house. Consequently, the vista north along Blue House Farm Road would historically have been of open countryside, as is currently the case. Likewise, the approach along the drive to the main house would have been uninterrupted by built form, as it is today, ensuring the imposing southern elevation remained the focal point in views.
8. By contrast, the proposed development would introduce new buildings and hard surface areas for access and parking into undeveloped space that, at present, contributes positively to the setting of Blue House Farm. Although in outline, approval is sought for layout and access. The proposed layout plan shows 11 detached houses, set out in a suburban arrangement to the north and west of the listed building. Whilst scale is a reserved matter, these are described on the application form as 2 storey dwellings; I have considered the scheme accordingly. The dwellings on Plots 1 – 4 would be particularly prominent in views north from Blue House Farm Road thus diminishing the open countryside aspect. Moreover, the group of five houses on the existing paddock west of Blue House Farm would encroach significantly into the open approach along the driveway. In particular, the house on Plot 1 would be set partly in front of the listed building's main façade and the house on Plot 11 would be located near the building, detracting from its centrepiece position.
9. For the reasons set out above, the legibility of the listed building's agricultural origins and connection with the rural undeveloped surroundings would be harmfully eroded and its architectural prominence appreciably reduced. This harm could not be adequately mitigated by planting, boundary treatment or the use of traditional materials. Thus, an aspect that underlies the significance of Blue House Farm as a Grade II listed building would be harmed and its setting and special architectural and historic interest would not be preserved.
10. Conflict therefore arises with the design, heritage conservation and enhancement aims of Wansbeck District Local Plan (LP) Policy GP16 and the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework).
11. In the parlance of the Framework, I conclude that the harm to the designated heritage asset is less than substantial. However, heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and therefore any harm requires clear and convincing justification. The creation of 11 dwellings, the contributions towards off-site affordable housing and the Council's coastal mitigation scheme, and the limited economic and social benefits which would be likely to arise from the proposed development do not amount to public benefits sufficient to outweigh the identified harm.

Accessibility of services

12. A lit footway runs along Blue House Farm Road between the appeal site and the B1331, from where it is possible to walk into Bedlington along another well-lit and level footway. Moreover, it would be a fairly short cycle ride to the shops, services and schools in the centre of Bedlington, and regular bus services run along the B1331, providing links to Bedlington centre, Newcastle and Morpeth.
13. Consequently, I conclude that the proposed development would be in a suitable location for housing, having regard to the accessibility of services, and would thus accord with the accessibility aims of LP Policies GP4 and T4. The appeal proposal would not accord with the strategy for the distribution of development set out in LP Policy GP1. However, the policy is not wholly consistent with the Framework's approach to the location of rural housing. I therefore give limited weight to the conflict between the proposal and Policy GP1 in this appeal.

Parking

14. The proposed layout plan shows drives and garages serving each plot, although details of visitor parking have not been provided and nor has it been clearly demonstrated that vehicles could manoeuvre on and off driveways. However, notwithstanding the submitted layout, in this case I am satisfied that precise details of car parking could be secured by condition. Indeed, I note that the Council has suggested the imposition of such a condition in the event that the appeal succeeds.
15. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would make adequate provision for parking, in accordance with LP Policies T6 and T7 which seek to ensure the safe and efficient movement of vehicles and the appropriate provision of parking in new development.

Planning Obligations

16. Under s106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the appellant has submitted an agreement which would secure financial contributions towards the provision of off-site affordable housing within Northumberland and services to mitigate the impact of recreational activity on designated sites on the coast of Northumberland. If I were to allow the appeal, I would need to consider the obligation against the relevant statutory tests. However, as I have found conflict with the development plan in relation to the first main issue, I have not addressed this matter further.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

17. In accordance with the provisions of s66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, when considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, I have a statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
18. I have concluded that the proposal would fail to preserve the setting and features of special architectural or historic interest of Blue House Farm, the adjacent Grade II listed building, and conflict therefore arises with the design, heritage conservation and enhancement aims of the LP and the Framework. This harm would not be outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal.

19. The Council considers that it can demonstrate a housing land supply of 12.5 years, although this is disputed by the appellant. However, even if I were to conclude that the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, the application of policies in the Framework that protect assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed. Consequently, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply.
20. I attach considerable importance and significant weight to the conflict between the appeal proposal and the development plan in relation to heritage harm.
21. Set against the identified harm to the heritage asset, the development would provide up to 11 new homes, which would make a modest contribution to the overall supply of housing. There would also be some local economic benefits in jobs created by the initial building work and subsequently sustained by the income of future residents, and contributions towards off-site affordable housing provision and the Council's coastal mitigation scheme. I afford these benefits moderate weight.
22. I have concluded that, having regard to the accessibility of services, the proposed development would be in a suitable location for housing. Additionally, I am satisfied that adequate parking could be secured through the imposition of a planning condition. However, a finding of no harm in these respects are neutral factors which weigh neither for nor against the appeal proposal.
23. Overall, I conclude that the proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other material considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which outweigh this finding. Therefore, for the reasons given, the appeal should be dismissed.

CL Humphrey

INSPECTOR