

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 October 2019

by P Eggleton BSc(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 October 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/19/3224419

Land behind 13 and 14 Rothesay Terrace, Bedlington NE22 5PS

- 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 Penelope Aston against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 18/02506/FUL, dated 12 July 2018, was refused by notice dated 20 November 2018.
 - The development proposed is a detached dwelling and garage; and garaging for 13 and 14 Rothesay Terrace.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are whether the site would represent an appropriate and sustainable location for new development; and the effect on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The proposal would result in a new dwelling on land that lies to the rear of 13 and 14 Rothesay Terrace. The site forms part of what is a relatively uniform area of land beyond the rear access road to this and the neighbouring terraces of houses. The plots of land are set behind each dwelling and divided into long narrow strips that generally reflect the width of each house. This and a number of other plots are of double width or appear to have been consolidated further into larger areas. I understand that this larger plot is not now associated with 13 and 14 Rothesay Terrace. A number of these rear plots have garages and parking provision adjacent to the access road. Away from the access road, many, such as this, appear to be unused and overgrown; some are in use as gardens; and others have been developed in a variety of ways, including the provision of workshops and housing.

Suitability of the site for new residential development

4. Policy GP1 of the Wansbeck District Local Plan 2007 (LP) allows the development of previously developed sites within settlement boundaries but does not accept the development of similar greenfield sites except in specific circumstances. The policy is relatively restrictive with regard to the provision of
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new housing in accessible locations and is not therefore fully consistent with the sustainability objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework). The weight that should be afforded to it should therefore be substantially reduced as required by paragraph 213 of the Framework.

5. It would appear that the appeal site has been unused for some time. Given the lack of any planning history, its lawful planning status is unclear. It is however in an accessible location, close to facilities and services and within the settlement boundary. In these circumstances, the benefits of a new dwelling, in terms of offering support for the social and economic objectives of the Framework, would be sufficient to outweigh any conflicts with LP policy GP1. The principle of residential development in this general location should therefore be accepted.

Character and appearance

6. The proposed twin garages would have no architectural merit and would face the access road at the front of the site. These would represent a very negative feature of the development. Whilst similar garages and parking areas are common features of this back lane, incorporating the juxtaposition of a new house, set behind the proposed garages, would represent particularly poor design. The garages would be the most prominent element of the new environment with the character and appearance of the access to the dwelling being particularly poor and austere with no opportunity for landscaping. The poorly detailed frontage would screen any potential landscaping within the site and provide a particularly unwelcoming approach and setting for the dwelling.
7. It is acknowledged that the site is overgrown and many of these plots have a poor appearance with the existing garages not being a positive feature of the area. However, accepting new and more substantial amounts of development, of poor design, would detract further from the character of the area. The proposal would be at odds with LP policy GP30 which seeks to resist development that would have a harmful impact on the character or quality of the surrounding environment; and LP policy GP31, as it would fail to promote character in townscape and landscape and establish local identity. These policies are consistent with the design objectives of the Framework and can be afforded considerable weight. I must also give weight to the Framework which is clear that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and requires that proposals add to the overall quality and are visually attractive.
8. Reference has been made to the emerging Northumberland Local Plan. This has not yet been adopted but in any event, whilst it supports the principle of new development, its design requirements are similar to those of the Framework.

Other matters

9. Reference has been made to other developments within the area. Of particular relevance is the frontage garages with a dwelling behind to the rear of 5 and 6 Rothesay Terrace. The evidence submitted suggests that the application was made in 2003. Whilst applicants should be able to expect consistency in decision making, that decision was made before the current development plan was adopted and well before the Framework was introduced. I am also not clear what other material considerations were taken into account when that application was accepted.

10. This proposal must be considered against the current development plan policies, the Framework and any other relevant considerations. The house and garages to the rear of 5 and 6 Rothesay Terrace fail to make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of this area and help to demonstrate that this proposal would be at odds with the design requirements of the current development plan and Framework. That development does not therefore offer support for the details submitted. Whilst I must consider this proposal on its own merits, given that there is clear potential for other plots to be developed in a similar way, this adds to my concerns. Reference has also been made to other developments that have taken place but these are not comparable with the design currently proposed.

Conclusions

11. Overall, the proposal would result in a new dwelling in an accessible location and it would result in economic and social benefits, in addition to adding to housing supply. I have also noted the potential for this settlement to benefit from improved transport links in the future. I afford great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes as required by paragraph 68(c) of the Framework. However, the details of this proposal would represent poor design that would detract from the character and appearance of the area and conflict with the design objectives of the development plan and the Framework. It would not therefore represent sustainable development.
12. I conclude that the harm that would result would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of a single dwelling. I therefore dismiss the appeal.

Peter Eggleton

INSPECTOR