



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 October 2019

by Jamie Reed DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 04 November 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/19/3232589

Land North West of 75 Stannington Station Road, Stannington, Morpeth NE61 6NQ

- 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 Mrs J Caulfield against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 18/03593/FUL, dated 25 September 2018, was refused by notice dated 29 March 2019.
 - The development proposed is the erection of five no. residential dwellings (C3 Use).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The application form describes the address of the site as being 75 Station Road, Stannington. However, it is clear from the information before me that the site actually lies to the north west of No 75. In order to make my decision as clear as possible, I have amended the site address to reflect this.
3. There is disagreement between the main parties as to whether the appeal site is within the Green Belt. The Castle Morpeth District Local Plan (MDLP) (2003) is the current adopted plan in this area and this sets the boundary for the Green Belt in this location and defines the boundaries to a number of settlements. It is clear that the Stannington Station area is not one of the settlements that is included and it falls outside of the Green Belt boundary that is shown. The Northumberland County and National Park Joint Structure Plan (SP) (2005) then sets out the general extent of an extension to the Green Belt in this area which the appeal site would lie within. However, Policy S5 of the SP explains that the precise boundary of the extended Green Belt and those around settlements shall be defined in future Local Plans. I am aware that there is an emerging plan, the Northumberland Local Plan (NLP) but this has not been formally adopted and as such, the only definitive boundaries at this time are those that are shown in the MDLP.
4. The Council contend that as the MDLP does not show the appeal site as lying within a settlement boundary, then it must be within the Green Belt. However, as explained above, I have relied on the Green Belt boundary as set out in the MDLP as it is the only detailed boundary established in the development plan. Whilst the main parties have made me aware of numerous appeal decision where Inspectors have come to differing views on this matter in this area, I

have to consider this case on the basis of the evidence that has been submitted in relation to this appeal. As a result, I have concluded that the appeal site does not lie within the Green Belt and as such have found no conflict with local or national Green Belt planning policy. Nonetheless, the appeal site lies outside of any defined settlement boundaries in the open countryside.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:

- Whether the appeal site is in a suitable location for housing having regard to national and local planning policy;
- The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the open countryside and surrounding area; and
- Whether the proposal represents an acceptable form of development with regard to flood risk.

Reasons

Location

6. The appeal site is located outwith any defined settlement boundaries in the open countryside. Whilst the appeal site's address is land to the north of 75 Stannington Station Road, it is actually located a considerable distance away from this road along a quiet lane that leads from it.
7. In areas of open countryside such as this, Policy C1 of the MDLP limits developments in locations outside of a settlement boundary, unless it can be demonstrated that the proposals are essential to the needs of agriculture or forestry and cannot be provided elsewhere. If the proposal is for housing in this regard, further criteria is set out under MDLP Policy H16. The proposal would not meet any of the criteria of Policy H16 and there is nothing before me to suggest that these dwellings would assist in meeting the essential needs of an agricultural or forestry worker, nor that if such needs did exist that they couldn't be met elsewhere.
8. The appellant contends that the MDLP is largely out of date due to its age and considers parts of this to not be in complete accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). However, the Framework makes it clear that existing policies should not be considered out-of-date just because they were adopted or made prior to its publication. Furthermore, it is clear that the Policies relied upon by the Council are aligned with the Framework, in particular paragraph 79, which refers to isolated homes in the countryside only being acceptable if there is an essential need for a rural worker in this location, amongst other things. Consequently, I have afforded the aforementioned policies full weight in this case.
9. With the above in mind, I therefore conclude that the appeal site is not a suitable location for the proposed dwellings having regard to national and local planning policy. Consequently, the proposal would be contrary to Policies C1 and H16 of the MDLP and paragraph 79 of the Framework. These require proposals for isolated dwellings in the open countryside to satisfactorily demonstrate that they are essential to the needs of rural workers.

Character and appearance

10. The appeal site is situated in the open countryside, midway along a quiet, single vehicle width lane that leads from Stannington Station Road. This lane passes an agricultural type barn and two pairs of semi-detached dwellings, which are spread out along the length of this lane and are interspersed with fields of varying sizes before the appeal site is reached. The site is a small field/paddock, surrounded by larger agricultural fields both to its rear and on the opposite side of the lane. As a result of the appeal site's position amongst the other open fields, the proposed dwellings would appear as an isolated finger of development projecting out into the open countryside, which would be uncharacteristic in this area.
11. Whilst I accept that there is a varied pattern of development in the wider area, much of this is situated along the main thoroughfare of Stannington Station Road itself, which is more built up in character when compared to the appeal site and the surrounding fields. It is not uncommon for such routes which link settlements together to have ribbon development of this nature occur along sections of their length.
12. Whilst I acknowledge that there are already two pairs of semi-detached houses situated along this lane, these other dwellings are more modest in scale and appearance than those that are proposed and do not appear as visually intrusive as they are not as far down the lane. The proposed dwellings would be larger in scale and are untypical of the rural character and appearance of the area. These would project further into the open countryside than the existing properties. As a result, the proposal would have a significantly harmful urbanising effect on the character and appearance of the open countryside in this area, which is largely typified by open fields.
13. It is noted that the proposed materials would be likely to further compound the harm identified above due to the dark colours proposed. This might be able to be addressed though through revised facing materials, which could potentially be controlled via a condition in the event that planning permission were to be granted. However, in any event notwithstanding the facing materials, for the reasons outlined above, the proposed development would be a discordant and harmful addition to the local landscape.
14. For the above reasons, the proposed dwellings would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the open countryside and surrounding area. Consequently, the proposal would be contrary to Policy H15 of the MDLP and Policy 10 of the Stannington Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2031 (SPNP) (2018). These Policies require proposals to respect the rural character and context of a site and to be compatible with the vernacular character in the locality, in terms of design and materials.

Flood risk

15. The appeal site is categorised as being within a Flood Zone 1 area, and as such is unlikely to be prone to flooding. Concern has been raised however that the site is within a surface water overland flow path route and as such, it should be demonstrated at the outset that appropriate surface water drainage can be successfully achieved on the site. However, it is clear from the information before me that the proposal would result in the dwellings having large outdoor areas with sufficient space to install adequate surface drainage management

measures. As such, there is no reason to believe that the appeal scheme would be an acceptable form of development with regard to flood risk subject to appropriate mitigation that could be secured by way of condition in the event of the appeal succeeding. Consequently, the proposal accords with Policies RE5 and RE6 of the MDLP, which when read together require proposals to not result in an unacceptable increase in flood risk.

Other Matters

16. The appellant has referred to a number of other sites in the vicinity which have been approved for residential development in recent years and considers these set a precedent in this area for further developments to come forward. However, there are key differences between these other sites and the appeal site. The most notable difference is that the majority of these other sites all front directly onto, or are in very close proximity to, the main thoroughfare of Stannington Station Road itself, effectively infilling sporadic gaps that occur along its length. Due to their difference in location, these other sites are not directly comparable to the one which is before me.
17. In addition to the sites identified on Stannington Station Road, there is another indicated in the appellant's statement referred to as "site 10". This site is known as Hepscott Park and is a major development for 89 dwellings which is currently under construction. Whilst located near to the appeal site, it is a brownfield site and evidence indicates that the dwellings are broadly being constructed where the previous buildings were located. In contrast to the appeal site, this site also fronts directly onto the busy A192, from where its access is taken. Due to these differences, this site is also not directly comparable to the one which is before me.
18. The appellant contends that the proposal accords with the Framework in many respects on that basis that it would represent a sustainable form of development in an accessible location that would provide an opportunity for self-build/custom housing, and that it accords with the general thrust of the SPNP in that the Stannington Station area is growing as a rural settlement and that the scheme would further assist with this. However, as set out above, I have found the proposals to be contrary to both the Framework and local planning policy in several significant respects. As such, even if the scheme does provide opportunity for a form of specialised housing, this would be in an inappropriate location as outlined above.
19. In addition to matters relating to location of the proposal, local residents have raised other concerns, including those relating to vehicular access and parking arrangements. Whilst I acknowledge these, they have not altered my decision.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Jamie Reed

INSPECTOR