



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 October 2019

by Jamie Reed DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13 November 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/19/3232885

Land South West of Old Gardens, Park Road, Swarland NE65 9HZ

- 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 D Mason against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00624/OUT, dated 20 December 2018, was refused by notice dated 24 April 2019.
 - The development proposed is 1 no. dwelling house (C3 use).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Outline planning permission is sought with all matters reserved. A number of plans accompany the application which are of assistance in helping to understand and appreciate the context and form of the development. However, these can only be considered as indicative, as all matters relating to access, appearance, landscaping, layout, and scale would be agreed at a later stage. Accordingly, I have considered the appeal on this basis.
3. One of the grounds that the Council refused the application was in relation to ecological matters on the site. Since then, an ecology report has been prepared, which the Council's ecologist has reviewed and in light of this, the Council has advised that it no longer has any objection to the proposal in this regard as it considers that conditions could be attached to any consent issued that would satisfactorily address such matters. I acknowledge and agree with this and as a result do not consider ecology matters in my main issues below.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - Whether the appeal site is a suitable location for housing having regard to local planning policy; and
 - The effect of the proposed dwelling on the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape.

Reasons

Suitable Location

5. The proposal is for a new detached dwelling on land located a short distance away from the hamlet of Old Swarland, which comprises a handful of dwellings and a farm, clustered around the junction of two country lanes, Park Road and the B6345. The appeal site lies outside any of the identified settlements set out under Policy S1 in the Alnwick District Local Development Framework Core Strategy (CS) (2007) and as such falls within designated countryside. In such locations, development should generally be limited to the reuse of existing buildings.
6. When new development is proposed in the countryside, CS Policy S14 sets out that such proposals will only be acceptable if they meet a range of sustainability criteria set out under CS Policy S3. This includes where the development is essential to support farming and other countryside-based enterprise and activity, promote recreation and supports the retention of sustainable communities or supports the conservation and enhancement of the countryside. No justification has been provided to explain how the new dwelling would fulfil any of the essential needs set out under CS Policy S14. As a result, the proposal therefore conflicts with this Policy.
7. Old Swarland has no service base and is therefore reliant on services in adjoining villages. The appellant argues that the proposal would help to support the services at the nearby Swarland Village in line with CS Policy S3 criteria 1. Swarland Village is categorised as a Sustainable Village Centre under CS Policy S1 where there is a strong service base. However, the country lane that connects the appeal site to Swarland Village is subject to a 60mph speed limit. It also has no footways and is largely unlit. Therefore, it is likely that the local services at Swarland Village would be accessed via a private motor car than on foot or by cycle. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policy S3 1 in that it would not be accessible to homes, jobs, shops, services, the transport network and modes of transport other than the private car.
8. The appellant has referred to a planning¹ application that was allowed on appeal² at a site in Rock, near Alnwick, which he considers presents a similar set of circumstances to those which are before me. In this other appeal, the Inspector considered the proposal would help bring settlements together, which would support services in the wider area, as suggested in Paragraph 78 of the Framework. A key difference in this other case, however, is that Rock is identified as a Local Needs Centre in the settlement hierarchy set out under Policy S1, whereas the site which is before me is identified as being in the countryside. As a result of these different types of location, this other example cannot be directly compared to the matter which is before me. Consequently, it attracts little weight.
9. Taking the above points together, I find that the proposal is not in a suitable location for housing having regard to local planning policy. Consequently, the proposal is contrary to Policies S1, S3 and S14 of the CS. When read together, these require proposals in the countryside to be sustainable and to either support farming and other countryside-based enterprise and activity, promote

¹ Application Ref: 16/00925/FUL

² Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/16/3158223

recreation and support the retention of sustainable communities or support the conservation and enhancement of the countryside.

Character and appearance

10. There is little development nearby to the appeal site, other than an existing dwelling known as The Old Gardens. This dwelling is set back from the roadside a significantly greater distance than the appeal site and is set within extensive grounds. The appeal site is, conversely, a smaller site and would sit towards the very front of the Old Gardens Site in close proximity to Park Road. The side of the appeal site that runs alongside this road as well as that which faces the B6345 are largely enclosed by high boundary walls of stone construction. These form a substantial enclosure to these two sides of the site, creating a distinct physical separation between where the site ends and the routes of these roads.
11. Policy S13 of the CS requires proposals to have regard to the landscape character of the area in which they are situated. This is assessed in the Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2010). In this document, the landscape in this area is described as being typified as a large area of rolling farmland. Other than its substantial stone walls and the presence of parked farm vehicles, it is clear that the appeal site would fall under such a categorisation, as its appearance is, notwithstanding the above, largely that of an undulating field that leads into other fields of the type described. As a result of these conditions, the erection of a permanent dwelling in this location would appear uncharacteristic.
12. The appellant contends that the appeal site is previously developed land, as it has been used for the storage of commercial and agricultural machinery, the remnants of which were evident at my visit. Whilst it is clear that the site has been used for such purposes, I have not been made aware of the legitimacy of such activities and as such, I afford little weight to this argument. Whilst I accept that the proposal would result in the site being cleared of the remnants of any such activities, the introduction of a new dwelling and the domesticated grounds within which it would sit in this location would be in marked contrast to the current predominantly naturalistic rolling countryside character of the site and the wider area.
13. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would be harmful to the existing character and appearance of the landscape in this location. Consequently, the proposal would be contrary to Policy S13 of the CS, and paragraph 170 of the Framework. When read together, these require proposals to protect and enhance the prevailing landscape character of the area.

Other Matter

14. The appellant contends that there is a demand for self-build/custom housing in Northumberland and that he would be prepared make the site available for such a form of development. Whilst I acknowledge the appellants desire to assist in providing an opportunity to help meet such housing demand, such benefits would not outweigh the harm that the proposal would have upon the countryside.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons given above the appeal is dismissed.

Jamie Reed

INSPECTOR