



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 January 2020

by Andrew Smith BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 January 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/V0510/W/19/3238886

63 Aldreth Road, Haddenham, Ely, Cambs CB6 3PN

- 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 & Mrs Jason Williams against the decision of East Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00813/FUL, dated 1 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 31 July 2019.
 - The development proposed is a replacement dwelling and garage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect upon the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is situated outside of any defined development envelope and thus in the countryside as defined in local planning policy terms. The development pattern along Aldreth Road is scattered and irregular with properties being varied in their type and design. The site itself is positioned adjacent to a network of agricultural fields and contains a vacant linear bungalow of modest proportions (the bungalow) and a setback freestanding garage. Views of these existing buildings from different points on Aldreth Road are obstructed, to varying extents, by the presence of existing planting.
4. Policy HOU8 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan (April 2015) (the Local Plan) relates to replacement dwellings in the countryside and is clear that, amongst other provisions, such a proposal should be of a scale and design that is sensitive to its countryside setting with a height similar to that of the original dwelling. The policy also sets out that, where an alternative height is proposed, it should be demonstrated that the scheme exhibits exceptionally high-quality design and enhances the character and appearance of the locality.
5. The proposed replacement dwelling would incorporate a first-floor level and would not be of a similar height to the bungalow it would replace. Indeed, it would be noticeably taller. Furthermore, the replacement dwelling, whilst narrower in width when compared to the bungalow, would occupy a notably larger footprint. The additional height and bulk that is proposed would mean that the new dwelling would be, when compared to the bungalow, more easily seen from a variety of public vantage points along Aldreth Road. This is even

- when noting its intended setback position within the site. In addition, the newly proposed triple garage would also incorporate a first-floor level and would sit only a short distance back from the site's frontage. This element would, in no small part, add to the scheme's visual prominence.
6. Both the proposed dwelling and its garage have been designed in a modern style and would incorporate elements of visual interest. These include a varied palette of materials and a series of gabled and glazed features to the dwelling's front-facing elevation. However, it is not the case that an exceptionally high-quality design would be achieved. Instead, an unduly prominent, bulky and intrusive form of development would result that would be at odds with the rural and predominantly undeveloped makeup of the site's surroundings.
 7. The bungalow is of utilitarian design and appearance and is showing some outward signs of neglect. Nevertheless, its discreet form and low scale mean that it has an unassuming and low-key presence upon the site. Against this starting point, the intended replacement dwelling and garage would have a noticeable and harmful urbanising effect. I do not dispute that investment would be required to bring the bungalow back into a liveable condition. This does not however legitimise its replacement with a property of the scale proposed.
 8. There are already examples of two-storey properties in existence along Aldreth Road. However, particularly when noting the underlying rural characteristics of the site's surroundings, this does not provide justification for the development of a further large house in this countryside location. Similarly, whilst other garages exist in the locality, I must consider the proposal on its own individual merits in accordance with the site circumstances to hand.
 9. I note that soft landscaping and boundary treatment would be implemented as part of the scheme, which would be anticipated to soften the external appearance of the proposed buildings to some extent. However, such landscaping would take time to properly establish and any new or existing planting could not be relied upon to provide a solid and permanent buffer to views. This is because planting is ever evolving, is reliant on regular maintenance to retain a consistent form and may be reduced in scale or extent in the future.
 10. I am aware that significant conifer screening was formerly in place at the site. Indeed, the remaining stumps were evident during inspection. As these works have already taken place, such tree removals (and any potential associated benefits) cannot be considered to form a part of the scheme that is before me.
 11. For the above reasons, the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. The proposal conflicts with Policies ENV1, ENV2 and HOU8 of the Local Plan in so far as these policies state that development proposals will protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance the pattern of traditional landscape features and the unspoilt nature and tranquillity of the area, and that proposals to replace an existing dwelling in the countryside will only be supported where the replacement is of a scale and design which is sensitive to its countryside setting.

Other Matters

12. I acknowledge that the site does not occupy an isolated location and is situated relatively close to Haddenham where a range of facilities and services are provided. Indeed, the Council has not raised concerns as regards the suitability of the site in this context. On a separate note, a 2017 appeal decision relating to a site in Norfolk¹ has been placed before me where planning permission for a replacement dwelling was granted. However, particularly given that a different development plan would have been in place, that decision is of little relevance to my considerations here.
13. I note that the appellants have referenced personal circumstances, having established a family and work commitments in the local area. However, these circumstances do not justify a redevelopment of the site at the scale that has been proposed. In any event, it is apparent that alternative approaches to replacing the bungalow in an enlarged form whilst not noticeably increasing built height could potentially exist. Indeed, it has not been clearly demonstrated otherwise.

Planning Balance

14. The Council has confirmed that a five-year supply of housing land cannot currently be demonstrated in the District. The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) (the Framework) is clear that where a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites cannot be demonstrated the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out under paragraph 11 of the Framework, is engaged. For decision making this means that planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the Framework's policies taken as a whole.
15. I have identified conflict with Policy HOU8 of the Local Plan. This is a policy that relates to replacement dwellings in the countryside and not therefore the supply of housing. It is broadly consistent with the Framework in so far as it recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. I have also identified conflict with Policies ENV1 and ENV2 of the Local Plan, which are broadly consistent with the Framework in so far as it requires that developments should be sympathetic to local character and landscape setting. I have found significant harm to arise upon the character and appearance of the area in the context of Policies HOU8, ENV1 and ENV2, which appear to me to be the most important for determining this appeal, and I afford the conflict with them substantial weight.
16. Turning to the scheme's benefits, it would generate jobs during its construction phase. This benefit attracts limited weight given the small scale of development under consideration. Whilst the scheme seeks to make more efficient use of this previously developed site, it would not deliver an additional unit of living accommodation and the public benefits associated with the delivery of a new and enlarged unit of accommodation on the site, including the associated support that would be offered to local facilities and services once occupied, would be limited.

¹ APP/V2635/W/17/3178329

17. Having considered the benefits and adverse impacts of the scheme before me, I conclude that the harm and policy conflict that I have identified would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the proposal's benefits when assessed against the Framework's policies taken as a whole. The presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out in the Framework, does not apply therefore. The proposal fails to accord with the development plan when read as a whole, and material considerations do not lead me to a decision otherwise.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons set out above, the appeal is dismissed.

Andrew Smith

INSPECTOR