



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 December 2019

by M Cryan BA(Hons) DipTP MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 January 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/F2360/W/19/3238704

Winston, Drumacre Lane East, Longton PR4 4SD

- 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 Ambrose Rayton against the decision of South Ribble Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 07/2019/5268/OUT, dated 4 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 15 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as: 'Outline planning consent for nine residential units including replacement dwellings on a site previously granted for five dwellings and one replacement dwelling'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application form described the proposed development as 'Outline planning consent for nine residential units including replacement dwellings on a site previously granted for five dwellings and one replacement dwelling'. It is clear from the evidence before me, including the Council's decision notice and the appeal form, that the proposal is for eight houses and gardens rather than nine. The Council determined the application on that basis, and I have done the same.
3. The application was in outline form with all matters reserved for subsequent consideration. I have consequently treated the submitted drawings showing a proposed layout of the houses as being for illustrative purposes only.

Main Issues

4. The appeal site lies within the Green Belt, and accordingly the main issues are:
 - Whether the proposal is inappropriate development within the Green Belt for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and development plan policy;
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - Whether the location would provide acceptable access to retail, education and community facilities by a range of transport modes;
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area;

- If the development is inappropriate, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt

5. The appeal site is a small farmstead which includes a farmhouse, and the complex of agricultural sheds and other buildings to its rear. The appellant wishes to demolish the agricultural buildings and to develop in their place eight dwelling houses sitting within large gardens.
6. Paragraph 143 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very specific circumstances. Paragraph 145 of the Framework states that, other than for listed exceptions, the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate. Policy G1 of the 2015 South Ribble Local Plan (SRLP) reflects the Framework's requirements.
7. Paragraph 145(g) of the Framework and exception (f) of Policy G1 of the SRLP allow limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use, which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development. However, the definition of previously developed land in the Framework's glossary specifically excludes land that is or was last occupied by agricultural buildings. As the site is occupied by agricultural buildings, this exception does not apply in this case.
8. Paragraph 145(d) of the Framework and exception (d) of Policy G1 allow the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces. The proposed new houses would be in a different use to the existing buildings on the site, and the exception therefore does not apply in this case.
9. I conclude that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would conflict with national policy to protect the Green Belt, and would be contrary to SRLP Policy G1, which reflects the Framework's approach. This is a matter to which I attach substantial weight, as required by Paragraph 144 of the Framework.

Openness

10. The most important characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Openness is the absence of development and has both a spatial and visual aspect. In assessing openness I have had regard to the way in which the site is currently developed. The agricultural buildings occupy a significant footprint on the appeal site, and some are tall. The indicative drawings suggest the proposed houses could be two storeys tall with additional accommodation in the roof space. The development would also introduce driveways and car parking, boundary fences and domestic gardens with various associated paraphernalia.

11. Agricultural buildings are an expected feature of the countryside, including the Green Belt, and indeed fall within the list of exceptions set out in Paragraph 145 of the Framework as being not inappropriate development. On the other hand, given the otherwise rural surroundings the proposal would represent the encroachment of a suburban built form into the countryside, contrary to one of the purposes of the Green Belt listed in paragraph 134 of the Framework. Accordingly, the proposal would have an adverse spatial and visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

Access to services

12. The appeal site sits outside defined settlements, with the nearest villages of Walmer Bridge, Longton and New Longton each around 1.7km away as the crow flies. Each of the three villages offers retail facilities and has a primary school, while New Longton has a doctor's surgery, and there is a secondary school in Hutton, a distance of around 1.8km away. The nearest bus stops are around 1km to the north on Chapel Lane and 1.6km to the west in Walmer Bridge. While both parties referred to a bus stop nearer the site on Gill Lane this did not appear to be in place by the time of my site visit. Drumacre Lane East itself, and most of the other roads serving the site, are narrow with no pavements and, for the most part, no street lighting. Furthermore, reaching either Walmer Bridge or Longton from the appeal site on foot or by bicycle would mean crossing the A59 Longton Bypass, a dual carriageway with a 70mph speed limit.
13. Taking into account the characteristics of the site location and the surrounding area, I consider that walking or cycling would be unlikely to be attractive options for most people making their day-to-day journeys, especially in darkness or inclement weather. I consider therefore that there would be a high dependency upon private motor vehicle usage amongst the occupiers of this development to gain access to retail, education and community facilities. While the relatively short journeys involved may be well suited to electric cars, there would nevertheless be a dependency on private vehicles.
14. I conclude that the location would fail to provide acceptable access to retail, education and community facilities by a range of transport modes. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policy 3 of the 2012 Central Lancashire Core Strategy, as well as the requirements of Chapter 9 of the Framework. Together these seek to ensure that developments provide safe and suitable access to the site for all users, and improve opportunities for the use of pedestrian, cycling and public transport facilities.

Character and appearance

15. The appeal site and surrounding area are predominantly rural and agricultural in both character and appearance. Most of the nearby land is open fields, although there are some very large agricultural buildings. While there are dwellings of different ages and styles these are predominantly, although not always, associated with the various agricultural and related businesses scattered throughout the area.
16. The indicative plans show a cluster of houses arranged around a cul-de-sac access road. This would introduce a development of suburban appearance and character which would be at odds with the area's rural and agricultural nature. The development would therefore be incongruous in its setting.

17. The proposed development would therefore conflict with Policy G17 of the SRLP, in particular criterion (a) which seeks to ensure that development does not have a detrimental impact on its surroundings by way of design, plot density or massing.

Other considerations

18. The appellant has previously received notice from the Council that prior approval for conversion of one of the existing agricultural buildings to five dwellinghouses under Schedule 2, Part 3, Class Q of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(England) Order 2015 (as amended) is not required. I have not seen the full details of that proposal, which has not yet been implemented. The criteria against which a prior approval application in respect of such a change of use and conversion is assessed are considerably narrower than those which apply for an application for planning permission. The possibility of a conversion of the buildings under permitted development rights is therefore a matter of little weight in my determination of this appeal.
19. The Framework recognises that there are circumstances in which small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting an area's housing needs. However, none of the various situations set out in Chapter 5 of the Framework applies. The site is not allocated in the development plan, and there is no proposal for affordable housing to meet identified local rural need. Consequently, none of these considerations are factors in the scheme's favour.
20. The redevelopment of the site could incorporate new trees and landscaping, which may improve biodiversity. However, these would be required for any development on the site to meet the requirements of the development plan. This would therefore be a minimal benefit to which I attribute little weight.

Green Belt Balance

21. I conclude that the proposal would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt that would also be harmful to openness. In addition, I have found that the development would be poorly related to local services, and occupants would be over reliant on private transport to reach them. It would also be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. There are no other considerations in favour of the development that clearly outweigh the harm I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.
22. The appellant has referred to the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However, the Council's Local Plan policies are up-to-date and Paragraphs 10 to 12 of the Framework indicate that the development plan therefore remains the starting point for decision making. I have also found that the proposal would not comply with those policies within the Framework which seek to protect the Green Belt.

Conclusion

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

M Cryan

Inspector