



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 January 2020

by M Chalk BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 February 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/W/19/3239210

Land at Oakage, Freewood Street, Bradfield St George IP30 0AY

- 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 & Mrs A Ellis against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref DC/19/0172/OUT, dated 14 January 2019, was refused by notice dated 17 July 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as erection of 1no. dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application was submitted in outline form with all matters reserved for future consideration. I have determined the appeal on this basis, treating the submitted plans as illustrative only.
3. The development proposed was amended from 2 dwellings to 1 dwelling during the course of the application the subject of this appeal. I have taken the description of development from the appeal form as it accurately describes the amended development for which permission is sought.
4. On the 1st April 2019 St Edmundsbury Borough Council was dissolved and along with Forest Heath District Council became a new non-metropolitan district council known as West Suffolk Council. The development plans for the merged local planning authority remain in place for the former area of St Edmundsbury Borough Council until such a time as they are revoked or replaced. It is therefore necessary for me to determine this appeal with reference to policies set out in the plans produced by the now dissolved St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:
 - Whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for new residential development; and,
 - The effect of the development proposed on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location

6. The appeal site is located outside of the settlement boundary of Bradfield St George, and therefore for planning purposes is in the countryside. The Council's planned strategy for new residential development is set out in its development plan, which comprises the West Suffolk Joint Development Management Policies Document February 2015 (the DMPD) and the St Edmundsbury Core Strategy December 2010 (the CS).
7. DMPD Policies DM5 and DM27 and CS Policies CS1, CS4 and CS13 together direct development sequentially towards Towns, Key Service Centres, Local Service Centres and Infill Villages, as defined in CS Policy CS4. CS Policy CS13 states that development outside of the defined settlements will be strictly controlled with a priority on protecting and enhancing the countryside. Bradfield St George is an Infill Village in the settlement hierarchy.
8. DMPD Policy DM27 states that proposals for new dwellings in the countryside will be permitted where the development is within a cluster of 10 or more dwellings adjacent to or fronting an existing highway, and the development consists of infilling a small undeveloped plot.
9. The appeal site forms one corner of the garden associated with Oakage. The wider plot is large and forms an extended frontage at the junction of Freewood Street and Felsham Road. Oakage and its associated outbuildings are located close to the Freewood Street frontage, and visually separated from the appeal site. The Felsham Road frontage to the appeal site currently comprises an uninterrupted hedgerow between the neighbouring house, Hollyoaks, and the Freewood Street junction.
10. The development proposed does not therefore consist of the infilling of a small undeveloped plot, but rather the intrusive extension of an existing ribbon of frontage development into the countryside.
11. The appellants suggest that development plan policies restricting development in the countryside are out of date. The development plan does not absolutely prohibit residential development in the countryside. Rather, it steers new residential development towards existing settlements, which is an approach supported by the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Paragraph 170 of the Framework requires that planning policies and decisions recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Paragraph 78 of the Framework states that planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive. I consider that the settlement hierarchy set out in the West Suffolk development plan does this by identifying settlements most suitable for new development, and its policies limit development in the countryside to appropriate proposals. I therefore consider that the policies which are most important for determining the application are not out of date.
12. The appellants also note that the appeal site immediately adjoins the settlement boundary and suggest that as a result the appeal proposal is sustainable development given its access to services and public transport is no different to properties within the settlement. The development proposed would not create an isolated home in the countryside, within the meaning of paragraph 79 of the Framework. However, the settlement boundary specifically

excludes Oakage and its associated land, including the appeal site. The site is a large and important visual gap in the street frontage marking the transition from the built-up area of the settlement into the countryside beyond.

13. The appellant has referred to a recent decision¹ by the Council granting permission nearby for a new dwelling. It appears to me, however, that the application site in this case was within the settlement boundary. I do not therefore consider that this approved development is directly comparable to the proposal before me.
14. Having considered these matters I therefore conclude that the appeal site is not an appropriate location for new residential development. The development proposed therefore conflicts with Policies DM5 and DM27 of the DMPD. Taken together these policies limit housing in the countryside to prevent an adverse impact on the environment.

Character and Appearance

15. The appeal site is garden land within the grounds of Oakage, and is presently largely screened from view by the established hedgerow along the street frontage. The appellants contend that the development will be modest in scale, and that together with the presence of existing houses in its surroundings the development would not result in an urbanising effect in the countryside.
16. During my site visit it was possible to see the roofs to the garage and outbuilding in the grounds of Oakage from Felsham Road. The neighbouring property, Hollyoaks, is a bungalow and its roof projects significantly above the height of the hedgerow fronting Felsham Road.
17. Notwithstanding that the scale of development is a reserved matter, I therefore consider that any dwelling constructed on the appeal site would be visible in the area. As there is no building currently on the appeal site, the development would be a visually intrusive form of development in the countryside, out of keeping with the rural character of the site.
18. Therefore, I conclude that the development proposed would be harmful to the rural character and appearance of the area. It therefore conflicts with Policies DM2 and DM22 of the DMPD. Taken together these policies require that development maintain or create a sense of place and/or character and should not involve the loss of important green areas which make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of a settlement. I am satisfied that these policies accord with the aims of the Framework, and there is therefore no conflict with national policy.

Other Matters

19. The appellants have suggested that the development would deliver benefits through economic and social support for local services, including those in neighbouring villages. The construction of an additional home would contribute towards housing need. In addition, I consider that there would likely be an economic benefit from the construction of the proposed dwelling. However, I consider that the benefits of a single dwelling are modest. In this case I find that the harm that I have identified above would outweigh the benefits identified.

¹ Council ref: DC/18/2496/OUT Land At 27, Hollybush Corner, Bradfield St George, Suffolk

20. The appellants contend that the appeal proposal would not cause harm to highway safety or residential amenity. I note as well that no objections were received regarding the proposal following amendments to reduce the proposed number of dwellings and address concerns regarding nearby trees. However, the absence of identified harm is a neutral consideration in my determination of this appeal.

Conclusion

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

M Chalk

INSPECTOR