



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 February 2020

by S A Schinaia MSc EngD FGS

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12th May 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/F2605/W/19/3237995

Whitehorse Farmhouse, Mere Road, Stow Bedon NR17 1BX

- 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 O Hannam against the decision of Breckland District Council.
 - The application Ref 3PL/2019/0726/F, dated 14 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 4 September 2019.
 - The development proposed is three bed dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. Since the decision to refuse planning permission was made, the Breckland District Council has adopted the Breckland Local Plan (BLP), which supersedes the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (2009). The Council has brought to my attention the policies adopted from the BLP that are relevant to the appeal.
3. The Council has confirmed that the BLP policies do not affect their assessment and decision and the appellant's agent has confirmed in their final comments that the assessment within their appeal statement stands in relation to the new policies.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for the appeal proposal, having regard to local and national planning policies for the delivery of sustainable development and the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location of development

5. The appeal site is a paddock to the east of the Whitehorse Farmhouse in Stow Bedon. Stow Bedon is a small village with very limited facilities. The farmhouse itself is within a cluster of dwellings located away from the rest of the village. The appeal site is outside any settlement boundary. Settlement boundaries were introduced to implement sustainable development, in terms of availability of community facilities, public transport, level of employment available and essential community services and infrastructure. According to the BLP the settlement strategy in rural areas was developed to promote sustainable

development and delivering housing where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities, according to paragraph 78 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) (the Framework).

6. The LPA has confirmed that with the adoption of the BLP in November 2019 the settlement boundary around Stow Bedon was removed. The nearest settlement boundaries to the appeal site are Rocklands and Carston. The appellant's agent has commented on the new settlement presence that Policy HOU05 of the BLP "allows development outside settlement boundaries subject to it being considered as infill development or rounding off".
7. The absence of a settlement boundary in the area and removal of a settlement boundary in Stow Bedon indicates that both the village and the appeal site are not sustainable locations for development, due to the limited availability of services and the absence of public transport. Residents would rely on the car daily to access services and facilities offered by larger settlements. Given the position outside the settlement boundary, in a location that is not sustainable, I conclude that the proposal would be contrary to Policy GEN01 of the BLP, which establishes a framework for what constitutes sustainable development in Breckland.
8. There is a very small cluster of dwellings around the farmhouse and other sparse dwellings further west in Mere Road. The proposal site is not adjacent to the farmhouse dwellings and is located further afield in open countryside and further east in Mere Road, surrounded by arable fields and the remaining part of the paddock to the west of the property. Due to the very sporadic distribution of dwellings along Mere Road and surrounding areas, the appeal site would appear isolated and would not satisfy the criteria of infilling or rounding off development of a cluster of dwellings.
9. The appellant has brought to my attention four appeals that have been allowed in Tharston, Bradenham, Newman's Green, and Besthorpe, respectively. Tharston and Newman's Green are in different districts and therefore different policies apply. The circumstances of the proposals are different from this case and I am not aware of the details. For instance, I noticed that the sites in Tharston and Bradenham are close to the villages of Long Stratton and Necton, respectively, which are larger settlements with more services and facilities than Stow Bedon, Rocklands and Caston. Equally, Newman's Green and Besthorpe are close to the market towns of Sudbury and Attleborough. Furthermore, in all cases, the appeal sites have different locational aspects from this case, as they may be considered either infilling or rounding off in clusters of dwellings. However, I have considered this appeal proposal on its own merits and concluded that the appeal site is not an appropriate location for the reasons set out above.
10. The appellant has brought to my attention the appeal allowed in North Pickenham, with a planning condition imposed for the installation of an electric charging point to help offset the environmental impacts resulting by the use of a private car. The circumstances of that appeal appear quite different from this one. For instance, the appeal is for a larger development of eight dwellings. Furthermore, there are no circumstances that can support the proposal according to paragraph 79 of the Framework and justify such a measure in a condition.

11. Policy HOU05 states that development in smaller villages and hamlets outside of defined settlement boundaries will be limited, apart from when it complies with other policies in the plan and with specific criteria. Furthermore, Policy HOU05 specifies that farmsteads and small-scale groups of dwellings are considered as lying in the open countryside, are not classed as small villages and hamlets and are unlikely to be considered acceptable. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would be contrary to Policy HOU05 of the BLP and to paragraph 79 of the Framework, which seeks to avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless specific circumstances apply, none of which relate to the proposed development.

Character and appearance

12. The appeal site is an unkempt paddock with hedgerows and trees on the boundaries, surrounded by agricultural land and open countryside. Although it is recognised that the proposed dwelling would be built with high quality design standards and limited environmental impacts, the proposal would still introduce a two-storey building, a garage and a residential garden in undeveloped land. The large residential garden would introduce domestic elements into a countryside location in the form of ornamental plantings, garden structures, patios and other domestic paraphernalia that would represent an unsuitable development for the countryside.
13. The proposed development would therefore be visually intrusive and detrimental in terms of scale and massing to the open and undeveloped character of the countryside in the area. The proposed dwelling would still be largely visible from public viewpoints even with hedges providing some screenings to the south and the north east of the property. I conclude that the overall impact on the character and appearance of the area would conflict with Policies HOU05, HOU06 and COM01 of the BLP. Policy HOU06 has regard to the density of development in relation to the character of the area. Policy COM01 seeks high standards of design to contribute to the character and amenity of areas. The proposal would also be contrary to Policy ENV06 of the BLP as it would not enhance the rural character of the area and the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Other matters

14. Although I understand the economic difficulties of the appellant to buy a house and his intent to build a house close to his parents, these are not sufficient reasons to justify the appeal proposal. In addition, self-build developments would still need to be compliant with local and national planning policies.

Conclusion

15. The addition of a dwelling would result in a very limited enhancement of the vitality of the rural community in terms of social and economic benefits, including a very small contribution to the housing supply. Considering the three dimensions of sustainable development together, the economic and social benefits would not outweigh the environmental harm due to the impact on the character and appearance of the area and the lack of accessibility of the location. Overall, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, the adverse impacts of the proposed development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Therefore, the proposal would not represent sustainable development.

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

S A Schinaia

INSPECTOR