
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 June 2020

by John Morrison BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 June 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/L2630/W/20/3246163

The Maples, Norwich Road, Ashwellthorpe NR16 1EL

- 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 Ms Sophia O'Callaghan against the decision of South Norfolk District Council.
 - The application Ref 2019/2222, dated 1 November 2019, was refused by notice dated 17 January 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as the construction of a single chalet dwelling.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. There are two main issues. These are whether the appeal site is a suitable location for new housing having regard to the development plan and sustainable patterns of new development and the effect of the appeal scheme on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Suitable Location

3. The appeal site is located outside of a defined settlement, it is therefore in the countryside. To promote sustainable patterns of development, the JCS¹ and Policy DM 1.3 of the Local Plan² direct it to within defined settlement limits, restricting development in the countryside to specific types. As an open market single dwelling, the appeal scheme would not be one such type.
4. Policy 1 of the JCS sets out, amongst other things, that development should be located to minimise the need to travel and give priority to low impact modes. Policy 6 further explains that development should be concentrated close to essential services to encourage walking and cycling as the primary means of travel with public transport for wider access. Policy DM 3.10 of the Local Plan reinforces this stance, stating that all development should support sustainable transport and development objectives, utilise all opportunities to integrate with local sustainable transport networks, be designed to reduce the need to travel

¹ Greater Norwich Development Partnership Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk 2011, amended 2014

² South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies Document 2015

- and to maximise the use of sustainable forms of transport appropriate to the location.
5. Whilst the development plan identifies Ashwellthorpe as a service village which is able to support some development due to having some services, this is restricted to within its limit. The appeal site is some considerable distance to the east of its outer edge, along a narrow, single carriageway, unlit rural road that does not have segregated footways.
 6. There is a bus stop very close to the appeal site. The appellant states that a single service operates from it³. There is a railway station at Wymondham, providing services to Norwich, Cambridge and connections to London. Evidence on the reliability and frequency of what is a limited bus service have not however been provided and journeys to the larger urban areas appear to be reliant on a number of connections.
 7. With this and the above in mind, it seems most likely that future occupiers of the dwelling would rely almost wholly on the private car to access education, retail, employment and healthcare provision. Services that would support their day to day life. This is the least sustainable travel option.
 8. I acknowledge that as a single dwelling such journeys would not be overly frequent or necessarily great in number, but I would not be satisfied justifying a dwelling in an otherwise unsustainable location for this reason which in any event is an argument that could be repeated too often. The dwelling would also be within an existing group and subsequently not necessarily isolated for the purposes of the Framework⁴, but this would not make it acceptable for the reasons I have given.
 9. I am mindful that Policy DM 1.3 does suggest planning permission for development in the countryside, outside of defined settlements could be granted. Albeit it stipulates that this is in an 'only if' situation. Specifically, where policies allow for such development or a proposal otherwise demonstrates overriding benefits in terms of economic, social and environmental dimensions.
 10. As I have set out above, the appeal scheme would not sit squarely with any of the 'exceptions' for development in the countryside. The appeal scheme would provide for new housing, adding to choice and mix locally and there would also be some economic benefits in supporting employment in the construction industry. Longer term, occupants the dwelling would contribute to local taxation and general spending. As a single open market dwelling on an otherwise undeveloped site however, such benefits would be limited in their scale and thus overall effect, to the extent that I would not describe them as overriding. In any event, there would be harm and conflict with other policies of the development plan arising out of the scheme in environmental terms.
 11. Taking all of this into account, the appeal site would not be a suitable location for new housing. It would serve to promote unsustainable patterns of new development, contrary to the policies of the development plan. Those relevant and their aims have been set out.

³ 805 Wreningham to Wymondham

⁴ The National Planning Policy Framework 2019

Character and Appearance

12. The appeal site is an irregular shaped flat parcel of land located at the junction of Norwich Road and Wymondham Road. It is to the rear of a dense hedge and tree belt that lines the back edge of Norwich Road. There is a gated access that currently runs from Wymondham Road. The appeal scheme seeks outline planning permission with access for consideration. The submitted plans show that the access would be a new one, taken directly off Norwich Road.
13. As I have said, the appeal site is in the countryside. There is therefore a distinct rurality to its surroundings which also includes a cluster of dwellings arranged informally around Norwich Road, Wymondham Road and Blacksmiths Lane. There is also a strong verdant character to the immediate street scene, emphasised by road edge planting and overhanging trees which conceals the substance of most plots. Buildings vary in their size and shape and lack uniformity in terms of their set back from their frontage. Generally, and with one exception, plot sizes are generous, reinforcing the spacious rural character of the area.
14. The appeal scheme would be on an uncharacteristically small plot and whilst it seems to be the intention to deliver a small dwelling, it would appear squeezed into a visible space, impinging on the area's spacious rural feel. In needing to be a small dwelling in order to provide a meaningful garden and off street parking, it is also likely to require a first floor, which owing to its limited land take would emphasise its height. I noted the density of the planting on the Norwich Road boundary and if retained this could provide some screening, lessen the visual effect of the dwelling and go some way to reinforcing the inconspicuous nature of buildings in the area. However, this is unlikely to be sufficiently effective given the dwelling would be visible from Wymondham Road in any event as well as from Norwich Road following some inevitable removal of hedge and trees for the creation of the access. The loss of substantial vegetative cover on the back edge of the Norwich Road boundary would also significantly reduce the verdant character of the street scene as I have identified it.
15. For these reasons, the appeal scheme would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. As I have alluded to above, there is a small plot afforded to a dwelling in the immediate vicinity of the appeal site. In actual fact, not a dissimilar size to that which would be afforded to the proposed dwelling. However, the evidence suggests that this dwelling arose from a conversion scheme and thus is not directly comparable. It is in any case an anomalous feature in the immediate area, wholly against the prevailing character as I have described it. I am not therefore convinced that such a feature should be repeated given the harm that it would cause.
16. Since the proposed development would not be suitable for the character and appearance of the area it would conflict with Policy 2 of the JCS and Policies DM 3.8 and DM 4.5 of the Local Plan. Amongst other things, these policies seek to ensure that new development achieves a high quality design that creates a strong sense of place and respects, conserves and where possible enhances the landscape character of its immediate and wider environment.

Conclusion

17. I have had regard to other matters that have been raised but it is for the reasons set out above that the appeal is dismissed.

John Morrison

INSPECTOR