
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 June 2020

by A Blicq BSc (Hons) MA CMLI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30th June 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Y2430/W/20/3246348

Former paddock, land adjacent to Branston Road, Eaton NG32 1EU

- 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 S Jepson against the decision of Melton Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00723/OUT, dated 27 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 22 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is 4 no new dwellings with associated parking and amenity space.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The application is for outline permission with all matters reserved except access.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - Whether the development would accord with relevant local and national policies with regard to location; and,
 - Whether there is a proven local need for housing in Eaton.

Reasons

Location

4. Eaton is identified as a rural settlement in Policy SS2 of the Melton Local Plan (MLP). This states that in rural settlements windfall sites will be expected to accommodate a proportion of the borough's housing need. Such development will meet the needs and enhance the sustainability of the settlement in accordance with MLP Policy SS3.
5. MLP Policy SS3 states that residential development will be allowed within or on the edge of existing settlements, subject to compliance with a series of criteria. These include that new housing meets a proven local need, and that it is serviced by sustainable infrastructure, or provides new infrastructure or services that have wider use.
6. Eaton is a very small village in a notably rural agricultural setting, and the appeal site is a field located at the edge of the village. The lack of

- infrastructure and facilities is highlighted by the design and access statement and the housing survey.
7. The appellant has highlighted that there is a footpath to the nearby A607 about a mile away. However, there is nothing before me to locate the route of this footpath. Moreover, it is unclear what terrain would be experienced on the path, or what mode or frequency of forward travel would be available to anyone who arrived at the A607 from the footpath. In any case, although footpaths might be an attractive option for able-bodied people in good weather and when walkers are not burdened by shopping or other baggage, they are not appropriate for everyone, particularly in bad weather and in the dark.
 8. Although I appreciate that there is a two hourly bus service between Eaton and Melton Mowbray, this is not necessarily convenient for school children, commuters or people wishing to access day to day amenities in nearby towns. Nor would it assist people wishing to access the fast east coast railway line at Grantham. Moreover, the narrow road into the village centre has no footways and is unlit which would make the route to the bus stop unsafe and unsatisfactory. I appreciate that the village is located about 1.5 miles from the A607, which links Melton Mowbray and Grantham, but this does not alter my reasoning that future occupiers would be largely dependent on private vehicles to access services and amenities.
 9. The housing survey also highlights the lack of school places in nearby Stathern, that there are no shops for several miles, and the difficulty of accessing the doctor's surgery. Lack of local facilities also scored highly in the responses regarding life in the village.
 10. As such, I conclude that future occupiers would be dependent on private vehicles to access facilities which in any case would largely be some distance away in Melton Mowbray or Grantham.
 11. The development would not be serviced by sustainable infrastructure and nor would additional infrastructure or services be provided. I conclude therefore that the development would fail to meet the requirements of MLP Policies SS2 and SS3 as set out above. MLP Policy SS1 is a general policy in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and is less specific than those I have cited. Moreover, although Paragraph 78 of the Framework states that development in one village might support services in another nearby, there is nothing before me to suggest that the villages nearby have useful amenities.

Housing need

12. A housing needs survey was undertaken in 2019. About one third of residents responded. It is stated that 74 per cent of respondents thought that new housing was needed. However, support for new housing does not necessarily equate to housing need.
13. The survey concludes by stating that four dwellings are needed. Six respondents are analysed and four of these are households wishing to downsize. Nonetheless, although I appreciate that such village residents may wish to remain in the village, this suggests a dwelling would be released if a smaller house was found.

14. A further household is suitably housed at present and wishes to buy a similar or slightly larger house as a consequence of setting up home with someone else. These examples identify a desire to move but not housing need. A net increase in dwellings would not be required to fulfil their aspirations.
15. One household is currently on the housing register and their tenancy is about to expire. The current dwelling is too expensive and the preferred option is affordable housing. However, even though the application form states that one home would be an affordable dwelling, there is nothing before me to suggest that this household has a particular link that requires them to live in Eaton.
16. The survey also investigated whether people had left the village due to the lack of affordable housing. Thirteen respondents knew of people who had left the village, but less than half of those people left as a consequence of the lack of affordable housing. This equates to a roughly ten percent of respondents and I give this only limited weight, particularly as it is unclear how many of these people had work or family links to Eaton. Moreover, it is also unclear why 81 people answered this question when there were only 54 responses.
17. In the light of the above, I conclude that there is limited evidence before me to indicate that a net increase in local housing is needed to accommodate people with a local connection. Moreover, the application is not supported by the parish council who note that four dwellings have recently been completed in a different part of the village.
18. Consequently, I conclude that there is no proven local need for housing within Eaton of sufficient weight to weigh in favour of the appeal. The development would fail to accord with MLP Policy SS3 as set out above. Even if I was satisfied that there was a proven housing need, this would not necessarily overcome my concerns with regard to the site's location and its accessibility.

Other matters

19. A large proportion of the appellant's statement is taken up with the planning history of the site and procedural issues. However, although I appreciate that these are of concern to the appellant they are outside the remit of this appeal and weigh neither for nor against the arguments presented.
20. The appellant argues that the Council does not object to the principle of development. However, proven housing need is one criterion only for development under MLP Policy SS3 and the Council's decision also finds harm in respect of access to essential services.
21. The appellant also refers to a scoring system that analyses connectivity. However, it is unclear how this supports this application and in any cases all the appeals cited are in different council areas. I appreciate that development can occur in rural sites, where supported by an infrastructure that supports alternative modes of travel. I am not satisfied that this is the case here.
22. Other concerns have been raised by interested parties but as I have found harm in relation to the main issues it is not necessary for me to consider them further.

Conservation Area

23. Although there is no plan before me, the officer's report notes that the Eaton Conservation Area boundary abuts the site. Having regard to my statutory duty I conclude that there is nothing before me to suggest that appropriate residential development would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Conclusion

24. I conclude that this is very small and relatively isolated village and in the absence of proven need for local housing, it remains that the development's location would weigh against the appeal. On this basis I conclude that the development would fail to accord with the relevant policies of the Local Plan or the guidance in the Framework. The appeal should be dismissed.

A Blacq

INSPECTOR