
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 May 2020

by JP Longmuir BA (Hons) DipUD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3rd July 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/W1850/W/20/3244380

Belle Vue, Wrigglebrook Lane from A49 to Cress Cottage, Much Birch, Herefordshire HR2 8HS

- 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 Haydn Mock against the decision of The County of Herefordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 192417, dated 5 July 2019, was refused by notice dated 19 September 2019.
 - The development proposed is the construction of single storey dwelling on the site of an old cowshed and cattle yard on land owned by the applicant.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would accord with the development plan strategy of the location of housing and;
 - the effects on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

The appropriateness of a dwelling in this location

3. The site is to the north of Much Birch, a rural settlement between Hereford and Ross-on-Wye. Much Birch is bisected by the A49 which is the main road through the area; the site is connected by Wrigglebrook Lane.
4. The appellant's evidence states that site was an old cowshed and cattle yard, but these are no longer present, and the site is part of an agricultural field, which appears open except for a small field shelter to one side. There is an access with double gates onto the lane.
5. The development plan is the Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy (2015) (the CS). Policy SS1 sets out the context of sustainable development. Policy RA2 of the Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy (2015) (the CS) supports housing growth in or adjacent to a number of settlements including Much Birch. Its objective is to bolster service provision, improve facilities and infrastructure and meet community needs. The appeal site is not within Much Birch and given

its distance from the settlement, it cannot be considered as being adjacent. CS Policy RA3 sets out that in such locations residential development will be limited to proposals that satisfy certain criteria, none of which would be met here. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies RA2 and RA3.

6. The nearest facilities for the occupants of the dwelling would be in Much Birch. The appellant's agent outlines the distance to facilities, and notably, the nearest shop is identified as 1,500m away. The connecting Wrigglebrook Lane has no footway or lighting, and I concur with the appellant's statement that this is a relatively narrow road. These circumstances would be likely to discourage walking or cycling to the facilities. Similarly, walking to a bus stop would be constrained, even though the appellant suggests stops are 420m away as I saw on site. I have not been given any evidence to indicate that the bus services are frequent or their destinations.
7. I conclude that the occupants of the dwelling would be very likely to use car travel to meet their everyday basic needs and thus the proposal would conflict with CS Policy SS7. Amongst other things, this policy seeks to deliver development that reduces the need to travel by private car and encourages sustainable travel options.
8. There are suggestions that other similar dwellings have been allowed in the area, but I have been not informed of all the circumstances and details. Accordingly, I cannot form a conclusion about their significance and have in any case determined the appeal on its own merits.
9. The Council's decision notice also cites CS Policy SD1 but it seems clear to me that this policy relates more to matters other than those falling to be considered under this first main issue.

The effects on the character and appearance of the area

10. The site is adjacent to a rolling country lane, which is tightly lined by mature hedges. However, there are open views along the lane, including across the application site, of gently undulating pastoral fields interspersed by hedges and trees, which stretch into the distance. There are a couple of sporadic cottages, and a distant church but the landscape appears overwhelmingly of verdant fields. These features reflect the categorisation of 'Principal Settled Farmlands' in the Council's Landscape Character Assessment 2009, within which the site and surroundings are identified.
11. The appellant argues as this site was a former cattle yard and cowshed, a dwelling would be appropriate. However, these structures have been removed and the site appears as a green field. It is also emphasised that the surrounding hedges and vegetation would be retained, but these define the boundaries of the field rather than offering screening. I saw from my site visit that the proposed dwelling would be prominent along the lane not only from the frontage of the application site but also further to the north. The presence of the dwelling would detract from the openness and continuity of the view of the fields.
12. The dwelling would be built in vertical timber cladding and sheet roofing which are intended to engender an agricultural character. However, the fenestration of the dwelling would suggest a domestic appearance. It would also have a garden, and domestic environs including car parking. In my perception, the

proposal would appear as a dwelling in the countryside, which would be at odds with the verdant agricultural landscape. I conclude that one would not expect to see a house here and it would be perceived as obtrusive.

13. The area is not formally designated as a protected landscape but is attractive countryside, nonetheless. The proposal would undermine its integrity and would harm the character and appearance of the area contrary to CS policies SS6 and LD1, which overall seek to ensure new development respects landscape, townscape and local distinctiveness. I also consider the proposal conflicts with Policy SD1, which includes similar objectives.

Planning balance

14. The Council accepts that it cannot currently demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites (the 5-year HLS). Accordingly, the policies most important for determining the appeal are out of date and paragraph 11 (d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is engaged. Nevertheless, the proposal would run counter to the Council's strategy for the location of development and harm the area's character and appearance. The CS policies to which I have already referred and which I consider to be most important are consistent with the Framework, in seeking to locate development in areas that are or can be made sustainable, and in recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. I therefore give significant weight to the conflicts with those policies.
15. Set against these conflicts, is the contribution of a dwelling to the local housing stock and the social and economic benefits that would result. However, such benefits would be very limited in relation to the proposal. I acknowledge that the appeal scheme would employ sustainable design features and could provide biodiversity benefits which could be secured by means of suitably worded conditions. However, as I have found that there would be harm to the area's character and appearance, the proposal would not meet the Framework's overall environmental objectives.
16. The Council indicate that the NDP for Much Birch is only at a draft stage and should therefore be attributed little weight under paragraph 48 of the Framework. In any event, new housing is likely to be targeted within and adjacent to the settlement rather than the countryside.
17. The new dwelling would be prominent from public view and I have found that it would appear intrusive amongst the verdant agricultural landscape.
18. In overall balance, I therefore conclude that the impacts of the proposal are significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the benefits when assessed against the Framework as a whole. There is no reason to take a decision other than in accordance with the development plan. The appellant's personal connection to the land does not lead me to a different conclusion.

Conclusion

19. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

John Longmuir

INSPECTOR