The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 August 2020

by Robert Fallon B.Sc. (Hons) PGDipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/H2835/W/20/3249078
Land between Hillside and Hilltop, Hillside, Little Harrowden, Wellingborough, NN9 5BT

- 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 Wright against the decision of the Borough Council of Wellingborough.
- The application Ref WP/20/00026/OUT dated 13 January 2020, was refused by notice dated 9 March 2020.
- The development proposed is described on the application form as "A single over 55's, self-build bungalow".

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matter

2. The proposal seeks outline planning permission with all matters, except access and layout, reserved for future consideration. I shall consider the appeal accordingly.

3. The appellant has supplied a set of amended drawings that illustrate revised site and ownership boundaries (Revision A). However, the Council's decision notice reveals that its consideration was based on the original submitted plans (registered on 13 January 2020). I have not based my assessment on the revised plans as they are materially different to the original scheme and to do so would prejudice the interests of other parties who have not had an opportunity to comment on them. This accords with the planning appeal procedural guidance[1] which states that the appeal process should not be used to evolve a scheme and that the proposal considered by an Inspector should be essentially the same as that assessed by the Council and other interested parties. Regardless of this, even if I had accepted the amended plans, they would not have altered my final decision as I am dismissing the appeal for reasons other than the position of the site boundaries and ownership details.

Main issues

4. The main issue is whether the development is in an appropriate location, with particular regard to access to shops, services and community facilities and transport choices other than the private car.

[1] Annexe M, Section M.2, Procedural Guide, Planning appeals – England, July 2020.

Reasons

Appeal site context

5. The appeal site is irregular in shape and at the time of my inspection, was overgrown with a scrubland-type appearance. It lies within a small cluster of dwellings and fronts onto a narrow slip road connected to the A509.

Whether the development is in an appropriate location, with particular regard to access to shops, services and community facilities and transport choices other than the private car

6. The Council and appellant both agree that the site falls outside of any settlement boundaries and within the open countryside for planning purposes. Policies 11 and 13 of the Core Strategy[2] identify a settlement strategy, which seeks to restrict residential development in the open countryside subject to a number of exceptions.

7. The development does not adjoin any established settlements, such as the main built-up areas of the nearby villages of Little Harrowden and Great Harrowden. There is also no evidence before me of a local need for the development in this precise location, or that it is required for a rural worker near their place of work in the countryside. The appellant has also clarified that the scheme is not being justified on the basis of its exceptional quality or innovative design.

8. I recognise that the development would be in close proximity to other dwellings and not be physically isolated. However, this does not mean that it would be sustainable in terms of access to shops, services, community facilities and transport choices other than the private car, or that it should be approved.

9. Little Harrowden and Great Harrowden could be accessed by cycling from the appeal site, but the facilities of these villages are extremely limited in nature and future occupants would be heavily dependent on other settlements with a wider range of facilities further afield to meet their overall day to day needs. Furthermore, there is no interconnecting footway and streetlighting between the appeal site and Great Harrowden, and future occupants would have to cross the A509, a fast-moving road subject to a 60mph speed limit (which I found hazardous to cross on foot at my site inspection given the high speed of vehicles), to access the footway to reach Little Harrowden (which also does not benefit from streetlighting). As a consequence, I do not consider either pedestrian route enables safe-walking, particularly at night, and even more so for the over-55s, an age group which is more likely to experience mobility problems (and which this scheme is proposed for). I would therefore only expect a small proportion of trips to be made in this way. It has also been clarified that there is no sufficiently frequent local bus service to these or other settlements to significantly diminish the reliance of future occupiers on the private motor car.

10. I do not agree with the appellant that the sustainability of the scheme would be the same even if it was located immediately adjacent to the boundary of Little Harrowden, as the facilities of that village, albeit limited in nature, would be much more likely to be within safe walking and cycling distance.

[2] North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031, Adopted July 2016, North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit.

11. I recognise that in rural locations access to sustainable rural transport solutions will be typically less than that of an urban area and that development in one village may support services in another nearby. However, in this case, I found the overall level of day-to-day access to shops, services and community facilities by walking, cycling and public transport to be of such a poor standard, and consequential reliance on the private motor car to be so high, that I consider the appeal site's location to be inappropriate for new residential development.

12. I recognise that the environmental impact from vehicles would diminish as combustion engines are phased out and replaced by ultra-low emission and electric vehicles. However, even if a condition was imposed for an electric charging point as suggested by the appellant, I consider it unlikely in the short to medium term that the majority of future occupants would use these vehicles. As a consequence, this cannot be relied upon as a means of mitigating the inaccessible location of the site.

13. In view of the above, I conclude that the development would conflict with Policies 11, 13 and 30 of the Core Strategy, and Polices H4 and H6 of the Local Plan[3], which collectively seek, amongst other things, to; (a) guide new development to sustainable locations via a defined settlement strategy; (b) to ensure that retirement housing has good access to local facilities and public transport routes; and (c) only permit self-build and custom-build housing where it accords with the spatial strategy and Policy 13 of the Core Strategy.

14. I also find that the scheme conflicts with Paragraphs 9 and 103 of the Framework[4] as it would result in; (a) a planning decision not playing an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions; and (b) the planning system failing to actively managing patterns of growth in support of the transport objectives outlined in Paragraph 102; - namely, that it would be heavily car dependant and not promote walking, cycling and public transport.

Planning balance

15. Policies 11, 13 and 30 of the Core Strategy, and Policies H4 and H6 of the Local Plan are generally compliant with the Framework insofar as they relate to the main issues of this case and I therefore consider them to be up-to-date. Furthermore, the Council has also confirmed that it has an up-to-date 5-year housing land supply, which is not disputed by the appellant.

16. Paragraph 61 of the Framework states that when determining the number of homes needed, the size, type and tenure requirements for different groups should be assessed and reflected in planning policies, including people who wish to build their own homes. Although provision is made for self-build dwellings via Policy 13 of the Core Strategy and Policy H6 of the Local Plan, I am not aware of whether the Council has met the demand for self-build plots shown on the self-build register within the relevant base period. However, even if the Council had not, it is my view that when considered collectively, the benefits of the scheme, namely; - (a) the delivery of a self-build dwelling towards the Council's housing land supply and demand identified on the self-build register; (b) potentially releasing a family home to the open market as a

[3] The Plan for the Borough Council of Wellingborough, Adopted Plan, Part 2 of the Local Plan, February 2019, Borough Council of Wellingborough.
[4] National Planning Policy Framework, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, February 2019.

result of future occupiers downsizing; (c) future occupiers contributing to local shops, services, clubs and community organisations; (d) a net biodiversity gain from a separate parcel of land utilised for habitat creation; and (e) local employment during construction, would be of modest social, environmental and economic value, and not outweigh the harm identified above.

17. In view of the above, I conclude that the proposal does not accord with the development plan and that other material considerations do not indicate that the proposal should be determined other than in accordance with this.

Conclusion

18. All representations have been taken into account, but no matters, including the benefits of the development and the scope of possible planning conditions, have been found to outweigh the identified harm and policy conflict. For the reasons above, the appeal should be dismissed.

Robert Fallon

INSPECTOR