



Appeal Decision

Site visit carried out on 9 November 2020

by Mrs J A Vyse DipTP DipPBM MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 November 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/W/20/3254850

Land north of Poplar Farm Lane, Great Green, Thurston IP31 3SL

- 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 and Mrs R Studd against the decision of Mid Suffolk District Council.
 - The application No DC/19/05531, dated 25 November 2019, was refused by a notice dated 22 January 2020.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a detached dwelling (self-build).
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Decision

1. For the reasons that follow, the appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. This is an outline application with all matters, including access, reserved for future consideration. However, the appellants' statement of case confirms an intention to use the existing gated field access at the western end of the field within which the appeal site lies, adjacent to a driveway that provides access to Ashdown and Poplar Farm Cottage. The indicative plan included in the statement shows an access drive running through the field behind the roadside hedgerow, across land that is outwith the appeal site but is in the ownership of the appellant. The statement also confirms that 'the proposed internal access route will retain its agricultural use class, with a legal covenant secured to ensure the residential plot's right of access in perpetuity.' I have dealt with the appeal on that basis.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this case relates to the of the development proposed on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons for the Decision

4. The appeal site comprises part of a larger, generally overgrown field that extends to the east and west along the northern side of Poplar Farm Lane, a single-track rural lane that is enclosed by hedgerows along both sides. It is located outside any settlement boundary defined by the development plan, which includes the Mid Suffolk Core Strategy Focussed Review (December 2012) and the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan (October 2019) and is thus within open countryside for the purposes of planning policy.
5. Planning permission was refused for the erection of two dwellings on that part of the field to the west of the current appeal site, with the subsequent appeal

being dismissed in August 2019.¹

6. Great Green is a small dispersed rural settlement comprising, as noted by my Inspector colleague, small clusters of buildings scattered within the countryside around the routes that converge near to the appeal site. He found that even taking account of approved (but not yet built) development adjacent to the western end of the field (a single dwelling in front of Ashdown) and on land fronting Norton Road adjacent to Navarac to the south,² all of which permissions are still extant, the independent clusters of buildings were separated by fields (including that within which the appeal scheme are located) and the nearby roads. He went on to conclude that the dwellings proposed in that case would combine the existing clusters of buildings to the north and the south of Poplar Farm Lane, and that the scattered and spacious arrangement of built development in those clusters would be eroded through the creation of a larger built form, to the detriment of the character and appearance of the area.
7. Whilst the reason for refusal in the instant appeal refers to coalescence, the site has a different relationship with the two clusters referred to from the previous scheme. I am satisfied in this regard, given its site specific context, that development on the appeal site would not combine the two clusters and would not result in coalescence.
8. However, contrary to the view of the appellant, the three dwellings approved adjacent to Navarac would not, it seems to me, create a 'new and perceptible cluster of development around the Norton Road/Poplar Farm Lane junction.' Rather, they would extend ribbon development along the northern side of Norton Road, extending the existing cluster located further to the southeast, around the junction of Oak Road with Norton Road. That cluster, which includes Navarac, is contained to the north by Poplar Farm Lane and the wide, open field on the opposite side of the lane. That same field also contains part of the eastern edge of the Poplar Farm cluster (on the northern side of Poplar Farm Lane). As such, I consider the open undeveloped field to be an integral component of the dispersed settlement pattern here.
9. There is no suggestion that the appeal scheme amounts to isolated development as referred to in paragraph 79 of the Framework, given the presence of other development on the locality. Nevertheless, siting a dwelling within the central portion of the field would represent an encroachment of built form into what is currently an open and undeveloped area of countryside which helps define the extent of the existing clusters. Along with the lengthy driveway proposed and any parking, formalised garden areas, curtilage boundaries and associated domestic paraphernalia, the development proposed would result in an uncharacteristic, fragmented expansion of the existing pattern of development into the open countryside, which would erode the rural character and appearance of the area. That brings the scheme into conflict with policy FC1.1 of the Focused Review, which sets out the approach to delivering sustainable development and requires that proposals conserve or enhance local character. There would be conflict too with paragraphs 127 and 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which aim to ensure that development adds to the overall quality of the area and is sympathetic to local character, including the landscape setting, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

¹ Ref APP/W3520/W/18/3225219

² Application Nos DC/17/04938 and DC/19/0224 and 19/03681 respectively

10. I note the intention of the appellants to construct a dwelling of thoughtful, local vernacular-led, high quality design and to retain and strengthen the roadside hedge in order to screen views of the proposed dwelling from the lane. However, even if the screening were wholly successful all year round (and I am not persuaded that that would be the case) it would still be seen from the access to Ashdown and Poplar Farm Cottage, and from the site of the approved dwelling in front of Ashdown. In any event, neither of those considerations overcome the fundamental harm arising from the principle of locating a detached market dwelling in the countryside.
11. The appellants draw attention to the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan. However, Policy 1 of the Plan seeks to focus new development *within* the defined boundary for Thurston Village. The appeal site lies outwith the settlement boundary. Whilst development proposals to meet specialist housing and care need on sites beyond the settlement boundary are supported by the policy, that is where it can be demonstrated that no available and deliverable sites exist within the settlement. There is no suggestion that the development proposed is intended to meet any such identified need. Accordingly, the principle of development on the appeal site derives no support from the Neighbourhood Plan.
12. The development is promoted as a self-build dwelling. However, there is no substantive evidence before me in terms of any supply and demand analysis for self-build dwellings in the area. In any event, the Planning Practice Guidance confirms that the duty to grant planning permission for self-build houses relates to plots of land that are 'suitable' for housing.³ As set out above, the appeal site is not suitable location for housing development.

Overall Planning Balance and Conclusion

13. The development would contribute a single dwelling to the local housing supply. However the Parish Council indicates that the Council can currently demonstrate a five year supply. I recognise that there are likely to be some social benefits through the contribution of future occupiers to the local community in Thurston and other nearby settlements, plus some temporary economic benefits during the construction process. However, the scale of the development proposed means that those benefits would be limited. The appeal statement includes measures to ensure a net gain in biodiversity, which could be secured by condition were the appeal to succeed. Again though, given the scale of the site, that is a consideration which attracts only modest weight.
14. In the overall planning balance, the benefits do not outweigh the environmental harm that I have identified to the character and appearance of the area, AS such, the proposal does not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development. I conclude therefore, that the appeal should not succeed.

Jennifer A Vyse
INSPECTOR

³ Paragraph: 023 Reference ID: 57-023-201760728.