



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 November 2020

by Nick Palmer BA (Hons) BPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 December 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/W/20/3256247

Existing sugar beet pad, Blacksmiths Green, Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford, Stowmarket IP14 5PY

- 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 & Mrs T Bowden against the decision of Mid Suffolk District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/20/00296, dated 22 January 2020, was refused by notice dated 20 March 2020.
 - The development proposed is change of use of existing previously developed agricultural land (sugar beet pad) to residential, erection of new private dwelling, creation of new vehicular access and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The application is for outline permission with all matters reserved. An indicative site layout plan has been submitted, which does not form part of the proposal but indicates a possible layout.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in the appeal are:
 - i) the accessibility of the proposal to services and facilities by sustainable means;
 - ii) the effect of the proposal on biodiversity; and
 - iii) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including its effect on the settings of listed buildings.

Reasons

Accessibility

4. The appeal site is located within a loose grouping of buildings which are in the countryside. It is some distance away from the village of Wetheringsett. This village has a limited range of services and facilities, these consisting of a primary school, village hall and church. The Mid Suffolk Light Railway is located there and there is a once daily bus service between the village and Ipswich.

5. Wetheringsett is identified in Policy CS1 of the Core Strategy¹ (CS) as a Secondary Village. The supporting text to that policy states that these villages are unsuitable for growth but capable of taking appropriate residential infill and development for local needs only.
6. No evidence has been provided of any footpath connection between the site and the village. In order to access the services and facilities in the village it would be necessary to travel some distance by road, as this is not a direct route. It is likely that any occupier of the proposed dwelling would be highly reliant on the car for transport. Its accessibility to services and facilities by sustainable means would thus be very limited.
7. Nonetheless, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. Journeys by car may enable support of local services and facilities in Wetheringsett and other nearby settlements. Although the lack of accessibility by sustainable means weighs against the proposal, this is to a limited extent.
8. Because the site is in the countryside and outside any settlement boundary as defined in the development plan, the proposal would not accord with Policies CS1 and CS2 of the CS which direct development to the villages in the settlement hierarchy and restrict the types of development that may take place in the countryside. The proposal does not accord with Policy H7 of the Local Plan² (LP) which also restricts new housing outside settlement boundaries. The blanket restriction on rural housing is not consistent with the Framework, as this takes a more flexible approach. Policies CS1, CS2 and H7 are thus out-of-date, which reduces the weight that can be given to them.

Biodiversity

9. The appellant has submitted a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, which concludes that the site has low ecological value and that there are no protected species present. The report recommends that biodiversity enhancements are provided and that precautionary measures are taken in construction.
10. Subject to the imposition of a suitable condition, the proposal would not adversely affect biodiversity. It would accord with Policy CS5 of the CS which requires protection, management and enhancement of biodiversity.

Character and Appearance

11. The site is within a group of five dwellings, four of which are listed at grade II. These are Meadow Farmhouse, which is to the north-west of the site; The Cottage, which is opposite the site; Deerbolts Cottage which is to the south-west, and Orchard Farmhouse which is to the south-east. These form a group of farmhouses that were historically grouped around a green, the road passing through this. The buildings date from between the late 14th/early 15th centuries and the 17th century.
12. Although the green no longer exists, the space between the buildings that formed this remains, with very limited modern development, notably a bungalow adjacent to Meadow Farmhouse. The historic relationship of the

¹ Mid Suffolk Core Strategy (2008)

² Mid Suffolk Local Plan (1998)

farmhouses to the former green and the agricultural setting can be appreciated and this forms part of the significance of the buildings. The proposal would be next to the road, centrally located and prominent within the group. Although it would relate to the bungalow opposite to some extent, it would erode the spacious rural character and intrude into the historic setting.

13. The proposal would be directly visible from The Cottage and Orchard Farmhouse. It would also be seen in conjunction with Meadow Farmhouse and Deerbolts Cottage from viewpoints to the north and south respectively. It would detract from the historic layout and harm the settings of the four adjacent listed buildings. That harm would be less than substantial, because of the distances of the site from those buildings.
14. The Council can demonstrate more than a five year supply of deliverable housing sites, and the contribution of the proposed dwelling to housing supply would be very limited in this context. Although the appellant refers to the proposal providing for local need and has provided information from the Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford Housing and Population Data Profile, there is no information before me to demonstrate that the proposal would meet a specific local need.
15. There would be some economic benefit from construction and the future expenditure of occupants. Any benefit in terms of support for local services and facilities would be limited.
16. Although it is intended to provide biodiversity enhancement and an environmentally enhanced dwelling, I can only give limited weight to these potential benefits, as no specific information is before me and the proposal is of a limited scale. The removal of the sugar beet storage use is unlikely, in my view to constitute a benefit because this is an agricultural use that would be expected in this area.
17. For these reasons, the public benefits from the proposal would be limited and attract only limited weight. On the other hand, the conservation of the heritage assets must be given great weight. The public benefits are not sufficient to outweigh the less than substantial harm that I have identified.
18. There is a hard surface on the site which has been used for storage of crops, and the base of a former agricultural building. Notwithstanding these works, the site does not fall within the definition of previously developed land in the Framework because of its agricultural use.
19. The proposal would not accord with Policy CS5 of the CS which requires development to maintain and enhance the historic environment. For these reasons the proposal would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the area.

Balance and Conclusion

20. Policies CS1 and CS2 of the CS, and Policy H7 of the LP are the policies which are most important for determining the application and they are out-of-date. Paragraph 11(d) of the Framework provides, in these circumstances, for permission to be granted unless the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development. I have found that the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the settings of designated heritage assets and that

that harm is not outweighed by public benefits. On this basis the Framework provides that permission should not be granted.

21. For the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Nick Palmer

INSPECTOR