
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 December 2020

by Andrew Smith BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 05 January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/G2815/W/20/3260157
Collyweston School, Main Road, Collyweston

- 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 David Pennell on behalf of Burghley Estates against the decision of East Northants District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00311/FUL, dated 27 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 15 May 2020.
 - The development proposed is refurbishment and conversion of disused Collyweston School to a dwelling house, and additional dwelling house on subdivided site.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The East Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2 (the LPP2) is emerging. There is nothing before me to indicate that the LPP2 is currently at a stage that should attract anything more than limited weight. I shall consider the appeal on this basis.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - Whether or not the appeal site represents an appropriate location for housing, having particular regard to the Council's spatial strategy for development and access to surrounding facilities and services;
 - The effect upon the historic significance of a non-designated heritage asset and the Collyweston Conservation Area (the CA);
 - Whether or not the proposed housing mix would satisfactorily reflect local housing need.

Reasons

Whether or not an appropriate location for housing

4. The appeal site straddles Collyweston's settlement boundary, as designated through the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (July 2011) (the RNOTP). The site is situated in proximity to existing development such that it does not occupy an isolated location in a purely physical sense. Notwithstanding this, Collyweston is a relatively small rural settlement (defined as a Category A

Network Village in the RNOTP) that contains a somewhat limited array of facilities and services. These include a community shop, a public house, a village hall and a church.

5. The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) (the Framework) states that, in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities and that planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services.
6. In broad consistency with the Framework's approach, Policy 11 of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031 (adopted July 2016) (the JCS) seeks to strengthen the network of settlements. The policy sets out that development in the District's rural areas will be limited to that required to support a prosperous rural economy or to meet a locally arising need, which cannot be met more sustainably at a nearby larger settlement.
7. Policy 11 makes direct reference to small scale infill development being permitted on suitable sites within villages (when certain other criteria are met), and this is clarified within the policy's supporting text to mean development of vacant and under-developed land within the main built up areas of the village on land which is bounded by existing built curtilages on at least two sides, such as the filling in of a small gap in an otherwise substantially built up frontage.
8. The appeal site is located to the edge of Collyweston's main built up extent and is bound by grassed fields/paddocks to its western and southern sides. The site is separated from the closest developments to the east by Main Road, which is a classified road that serves as the main route through the village. The appeal site is evidently not bounded by existing built curtilages on at least two of its sides. This is an important finding, which applies even though a network of roads would naturally be expected to exist within the built-up area of a settlement. Indeed, Main Road provides distinct separation between the built frontages that address each of its sides.
9. I acknowledge that, to represent small scale infill development, a proposal would not necessarily need to fill in a small gap in an otherwise substantially built up frontage. This is reflected through an appeal decision¹ that appears in the evidence before me, where planning permission was granted for residential development on the edge of the village of Glapthorn elsewhere within the District. Whilst that proposal did not fill in a gap in a built-up frontage, it was centred upon land positioned to the rear of frontage development that was bound by built curtilages to at least two of its sides.
10. The main parties dispute whether a planning permission² (the 2002 permission) to convert the school building that exists on the site (the main building) into a dwelling, and to erect a double garage, has been lawfully implemented. Nevertheless, the proposal that is before me additionally involves the sub-division of the site and the erection of a further dwellinghouse. In this context, whether or not the 2002 permission has been lawfully implemented is not a determinative factor in this case. Indeed, even should the 2002 permission be extant and capable of being realised, the further dwellinghouse proposed (if considered in isolation) would not represent small scale infill development.

¹ APP/G2815/W/16/3149683

² 02/00337/FUL

11. I have been made aware of an on-demand local bus service that offers trips between Collyweston and various local settlements including the town of Stamford. Nevertheless, all future occupiers of the proposed development may not be able to conveniently depend upon this service to serve their full day-to-day needs. When noting that a somewhat limited array of facilities and services are on offer within the village, the proposal would likely promote travel by private modes of transportation. This, even when noting Stamford's relative proximity to Collyweston, sits uncomfortably alongside the Government's objectives of delivering sustainable development in a planned and coordinated manner.
12. The proposal conflicts, in-part, with Policy 2 of the RNOTP in so far as this policy directs windfall development within defined settlement boundaries. However, the RNOTP was adopted in advance of the JCS and the Framework's original 2012 publication. Policy 2 frustrates the application of JCS Policy 11's more flexible and up-to-date approach to assessing proposals for development in rural areas. The identified conflict with Policy 2 attracts limited weight.
13. Nevertheless, for the reasons set out above, the site does not represent an appropriate location for housing, having particular regard to the Council's spatial strategy for development and access to surrounding facilities and services. Indeed, the proposal conflicts with Policies 11, 13 and 29 of the JCS in so far as these policies set out that development will be distributed to strengthen the network of settlements, that new housing will be accommodated in line with the Spatial Strategy and that the proposal does not meet the criteria to qualify for a rural exception.

Historic significance

14. The appeal site abuts the CA and is, for the most part, comprised of the grounds of the former school. The main building has architectural and historic interest drawn in-part from its traditional local materials, its ornate architectural detailing and from its relevance to the evolution of the village. Indeed, it has been correctly identified as a non-designated heritage asset. The main building is currently vacant, and, consistent with survey work undertaken, I observed some outward signs of deterioration upon inspection. As regards the CA, its significance as a designated heritage asset is drawn, in part, from its often compactly laid out array of traditional historic buildings.
15. The proposal includes works to extend the main building at first floor level, the introduction of a standalone garage, the subdivision of the site and the construction of a new dwelling. The intended first-floor extension would be sensitive to the main building's current footprint and form and the garage would appear as a low-key ancillary addition.
16. The Council's Senior Conservation Officer has sounded concerns that the newly proposed dwelling would have a negative intrusive effect upon the main building's setting through developing land that formerly served as the school's playing field, thus severing an historic connection in this context. I see merit in seeking to protect the former playing field from sub-division and from built development. Indeed, its existence and openness assist the main building in being read and experienced as a former school and as a building of status and local importance.

17. Even so, the new dwelling would be set down in height relative to the main building and, notwithstanding the anticipated use of blue slate to its roof, would be designed to broadly reflect the main building's form, appearance and architectural detailing. Furthermore, the new dwelling's modest footprint and intended setback positioning relative to both the main building and Main Road would further assist in ensuring that the main building would retain a spacious setting and visual primacy upon the site. It is also important to recognise that the intended conversion and refurbishment of the main building would support its long-term preservation.
18. The proposal, when considered as a whole, would cause a limited degree of harm to the heritage significance of the main building through bringing forward development within its setting. For the avoidance of doubt, my finding of a limited degree of harm to the significance of a non-designated heritage asset applies regardless of whether or not the 2002 permission is extant.
19. As set out at paragraph 197 of the Framework, the effect of a scheme upon the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determination and a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm and the significance of the asset. When factoring in the scheme's wider benefits, which include bringing the main building back into active use and providing two additional units of residential accommodation, the limited harm that I have identified would be outweighed by the proposal's benefits.
20. I am satisfied that the proposal would preserve the CA's character and appearance and would thus not cause harm to the CA's heritage significance through introducing development within its setting. Indeed, the proposals are, for the most part, centred to the southern side of the site and thus away from the CA's boundary. The subordinate height and size of the newly proposed dwelling are relevant factors in coming to this finding.
21. For the above reasons, the proposal's effect upon the historic significance of a non-designated heritage asset and upon the CA would be acceptable. The proposal satisfactorily accords with the requirements of Policy 2 of the JCS, Policy 9 of the RNOTP and the Framework in so far as these policies require that proposals should conserve and, where possible, enhance the heritage significance and setting of an asset or group of heritage assets in a manner commensurate to its significance and that, in weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Housing mix

22. Policy 30 of the JCS sets out that the mix of house types within a development should reflect the need to accommodate smaller households, with an emphasis to be placed on the provision of small and medium sized dwellings (1-3 bedrooms). Nevertheless, the policy also confirms that a mix of dwelling sizes and tenures should be provided. Indeed, Policy 30 does not require all new dwellings to be 1-3 bedrooms in size. It instead merely places an emphasis upon the provision of dwellings of this size.
23. Whilst a 4-bedroom dwelling would be created via the intended conversion of the main building, a smaller 3-bedroom new-build dwelling is also proposed to

be provided. To my mind, as part of a small two-unit scheme such as this, the provision of one 3-bedroom dwelling represents an appropriate emphasis being placed on the need to accommodate smaller households.

24. For the above reasons, the proposed housing mix would satisfactorily reflect local housing need. The proposal accords with Policy 30 of the JCS and with the Framework in so far as these policies set out that housing developments in rural areas should reflect local needs.

Planning Balance

25. Two residential units are proposed, and the Framework reaffirms the Government's objectives of significantly boosting the supply of homes. Nevertheless, two additional units would not make a noticeable difference to the District-wide housing supply situation and would be a benefit that attracts relatively limited weight.
26. A vacant building and previously developed land would be brought back into active use. When noting that only a single existing building is under consideration and that the site is of fairly limited size and situated to the edge of the village's main built up extent, these benefits attract moderate weight.
27. In addition, once occupied, the proposal would offer support to local facilities and services that are contained within the network of settlements of which Collyweston forms part. This is a benefit that attracts limited weight due to the scale of development under consideration.
28. The scheme's benefits, considered cumulatively, would be relatively modest and would not outweigh the significant harm and policy conflict associated with the site not representing an appropriate location for housing as well as the additional limited harm I have identified would be caused to the heritage significance of a non-designated heritage asset. The proposal conflicts with the development plan when read as a whole, and material considerations do not lead me to a decision otherwise.

Conclusion

29. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Andrew Smith

INSPECTOR