



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 August 2020 by Ifeanyi Chukwujekwu BSc MSc MIEMA CEnv AssocRTPI

Decision by Chris Preston BA (Hons) BPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/20/3254033

Land South West of Carterside, Carterside Road, Whitton, Northumberland¹

- 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 Miss Shona Ferguson on behalf of Northumberland Estates against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 19/03930/FUL, dated 5 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 28 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is demolition of redundant agricultural sheds and storage bay, with development of 4no. holiday cottages including access road, car parking, private garden areas, and other ancillary works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by an Appeal Planning Officer whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - Whether the appeal site is a suitable location for housing having regard to its accessibility to local services and local and national planning policy; and
 - The effect of the proposed dwelling on the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape.

Reasons for the Recommendation

Planning Policy and Suitability of site

4. Within its statement the Council has referred to policies of the emerging Northumberland Local Plan (the ENLP). According to the officer report the ENLP is at the submission stage. However, it is not clear if there are any outstanding objections to it, no specific extracts of the policies themselves have been provided and it has yet to be examined by an Inspector. Consequently, in line

¹ Taken from Council decision notice and appellant final statement as this best describes site location.

with paragraph 48 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), little weight can be given to the ENLP in the determination of this appeal.

5. The development plan for the area is made up of the Alnwick District Wide Local Plan (1997) (the LP) and the Alnwick District Local Development Framework: Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2007) (the CS). Those plans are of some vintage and both pre-date the publication of the Framework. Policy S1 of the Core Strategy (CS) sets out a settlement hierarchy for the location and scale of new development and identifies Rothbury as a secondary rural service centre. Whilst the application site is outside the settlement boundary for Rothbury. The appeal site is outside the settlement boundary within the countryside where the policy seeks to limit development to the re-use of existing buildings.
6. Policy S2 of the CS sets out a similar sequential approach. Whilst that does allow for development on suitable sites 'adjoining' Rothbury, the appeal site is clearly separated from and not adjoining the main settlement. However, as acknowledged by the Council in consideration of the application which is subject of this appeal, the strict sequential approach with a blanket restriction on development beyond the existing limits of settlements is not entirely in conformity with the Framework and the Council acknowledges that limited weight can be given to sequential policies as a result. In particular, paragraph 78 of the Framework states that; 'To promote sustainable development in rural areas housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services.' The Framework does not set a blanket restriction on development within the countryside.
7. Policy S10 of the CS seeks to ensure that proposals for new built cultural and tourism development are directed towards sustainable locations and states that tourism development in the open countryside will be considered against policy S14.
8. Policy S14 states that all development in the open countryside must be sustainable in the context of Policy S3, and where the development is essential to support farming and other countryside-based enterprise and activity, promote recreation and supports the retention of sustainable communities or supports the conservation and enhancement of the countryside.
9. Policy S3 of the Alnwick Core Strategy outlines sustainability criteria that generally need to be satisfied before permission is granted for new development. These include that the development is accessible to homes, jobs, shops, services, the transport network and modes of transport other than the private car; that there is adequate existing or planned capacity in the physical and community infrastructure; any physical and environmental constraints can be mitigated; potential implications of flood risk have been assessed; there would be no significant adverse effects on the natural resources, environment, biodiversity and geo-diversity, cultural, historic and community assets of the district; and the new development would help to build communities by sustaining or providing community services and facilities, or through the provision of affordable housing to meet identified local need. Those criteria appear broadly aligned to the aims of the Framework

10. As stated in paragraph 5 above, Rothbury is identified by policy as a secondary rural service centre and the Council was satisfied that the approved scheme at the site across the road² was accessible by means of transport other than the private car to other tourism facilities and services, such as Rothbury Golf Course, and the town itself is such that new development on this site would be broadly consistent with the aims of Policy S10 of the CS, so as to comply with policy S3.
11. The aforementioned scheme is adjacent a cluster of converted stone built former agricultural buildings which were approved for holiday accommodation but, according to the Council has been subsequently de-restricted to allow permanent residential accommodation³. There is nothing to indicate that the position in those respects has altered and it is unclear why the Council considers the present location to be less sustainable than the site immediately across the road. Similarly, the Council did not list the sustainability of the location as a reason for refusal in relation to the previous application at the present site⁴.
12. Having regard to the proximity to local services and adjacent buildings I am satisfied that the location is not inconsistent with the aims of the Framework in terms of accessibility. The appellant submitted an Ecological Report which on further consultation the County Ecologist finds satisfactory. The Council's Officer report also indicates that they consider that there will be no significant adverse effects on the amenity, highway safety and ecology in the area.
13. I recognise that the Council can demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land, but 4 additional holiday cottages would still make a small contribution to the provision of holiday accommodation. Furthermore, the officer report for the approved scheme across the road indicates from objections received, that there was a five-year supply at the time that scheme was approved. However, there is no indication of an upper limit on housing provision. Consequently, there is no change in circumstances in that regard and the policy position isn't substantially different to 2016 when the scheme was approved. The appeal site is located close to the approved scheme and existing buildings.
14. Consequently, given the limited weight that can be applied to the ENLP, the limited weight that can be applied to the locational strategy of the development plan on account of the inconsistency with current national guidance and the Council's own acknowledgement that the location would be broadly sustainable there would be no grounds to withhold planning permission on account of the location, of itself.
15. Having regard to the above, I find that the site is suitable for the proposed development and the provision of additional holiday housing would support the retention of sustainable community of Rothbury. Accordingly, whilst the proposal would not conform to the sequential approach set out within policies S1 and S2 of the CS, limited weight can be afforded to those policies. Having regard to the sustainability criteria within policy S3, policies S10 and S14 of the CS and the aims of the Framework I am satisfied that the proposal would be suitably located in terms of its accessibility to local services.

² Delegated Report relating to Ref 16/00594/FUL, particularly paragraphs 7.6 & 7.7

³ Paragraph 2.3 of Delegated Report for 19/03930/FUL

⁴ Ref: 17/03704/FUL

Character and appearance

16. The appeal site is a piece of vegetated land which consists of dilapidated and redundant open agricultural sheds constructed of steel material, with an area of hardstanding. It is located south west of Carterside Road in Whitton, Northumberland. The surrounding area is rural, and its character is mostly derived from open countryside comprising grassed hills used as agricultural fields. The site is bounded on the east, west and south by open fields. Aside from the existing sheds are no other significant built structures on the gently sloping hillside on this side of the road and the topography is such that the site is prominent in the landscape. Whilst the existing buildings are in poor condition they are utilitarian modern agricultural structures of a type commonly found within the countryside. As such, notwithstanding their present condition, their presence does not significantly dilute the enjoyment of the very attractive sweeping landscape of enclosed fields which rise up from the road.
17. North East of the site across Carterside Road includes a cluster of properties known as Carterside, comprising attached bungalows and a two-storey structure. There is also a detached two-storey dwelling. However, by virtue of its position on the other side of the road without any other adjacent property, the proposal would not be seen in the context of these developments but rather the open countryside landscape.
18. There is a difference in appearance between the existing portal frame buildings within the appeal site as compared with the more substantial stone-built structures at Carterside. The more vernacular appearance of the farmhouses and ancillary agricultural buildings across the road contributes to the character of the landscape whereas the portal framed structures appear as a more lightweight intervention, unrelated to the historic built form, but commonly found within the countryside.
19. Furthermore, the appeal site is at an elevated position and the introduction of four units of stone-built structures would appear prominent at this location. While it is accepted that the demolition of the existing dilapidated structures would bring some benefit to the visual landscape, the proposal which would include access road, car parking, private garden areas, and other ancillary works would substantially alter the character of the site. The overtly agricultural feel of the existing structures would be replaced with a series of domestic buildings, with associated cars, gardens and other paraphernalia. It would have an urbanising effect on the site and this part of the countryside.
20. The nature of the development proposed would dramatically change the appearance of the site and how it is perceived in the landscape from public views. Residential development of the site would appear conspicuous and incongruous in this rural setting and it would have a negative impact upon the undeveloped quality of the area. The development would have an incongruous effect on the landscape due to the siting and location of the cottages on a prominent hillside, with little visual relationship with existing built form.
21. I find that proposal would have a significant and harmful impact on the landscape, character and appearance of the area and find conflict with the Framework, particularly paragraph 170 which states that decisions should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and paragraph 127 which requires that developments are sympathetic to local landscape character and built environment and should add to the quality of an area.

Similarly, the proposal would conflict with policies S13 and S16 of the CS which seek amongst other things to ensure that new development respect the prevailing landscape quality, character and sensitivity of each area and protect and enhance the local environment having regard to their layout, scale, appearance, access and landscaping.

Conclusion and Recommendation

22. The site is located reasonably close to Rothbury and its associated services and is adjacent to other dwellings in a location that the Council has previously found acceptable for residential development in terms of accessibility. Thus, I find that permission should not be withheld purely in terms of the principle of the location. Nonetheless, it remains in a distinctly rural setting. In visual terms, the development would not relate to the existing built form on the opposite side of the road but would appear as an incongruous addition to the countryside for the reasons given above. The harm that would arise in that respect, and the conflict with the policies of the development plan and the Framework, is not outweighed by other matters and, accordingly, I recommend that the appeal should be dismissed.

Ifeanyi Chukwujekwu

APPEALS PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

23. I have considered all the submitted evidence and the Appeal Planning Officer's report, and on that basis, I agree that the appeal should be dismissed.

Chris Preston

INSPECTOR