
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 December 2020

by J D Westbrook BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 08 January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/D3505/W/20/3254275

Oakfield Cottage, Oakfield Road, Copdock, IPSWICH, IP8 3JS

- 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 & Mrs K Prentice against the decision of Babergh District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/20/01069, dated 9 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 6 May 2020.
 - The development proposed is the construction of a detached single-storey, two-bedroom dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The Council has referred in its decision letter to Policy CS2 of its Core Strategy (CS). The Council acknowledges that this policy, which relates to the boundaries of settlements within the Borough, has been subject to material delay in the review of settlement boundaries and in the allocation of development sites, along with an absence of a balanced approach as favoured by the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework). On this basis, the statutory weight to be attached to Policy CS2 must be reduced. I concur with this perspective and afford Policy CS2 only limited weight.

Main Issue

3. The main issues in this case are:
 - The effect of the proposed dwelling on the character and appearance of the countryside around Copdock, and
 - The sustainability of the proposed development by way of accessibility to services and facilities.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is a small triangular parcel of land situated on the southern side of Oakfield Road, in countryside to the south east of the village of Copdock. The site is part of what was once a garden or other land associated with Oakfield Cottage, a detached house within a plot at the junction of Oakfield Road and The Avenue. Between Oakfield Cottage and the appeal site are two new link-detached houses which have a shared access from Oakfield Road that is also used by Oakfield Cottage. The appeal site is currently a grassed area

with hedges and hedgerow trees to the boundaries. Oakfield Road is a narrow country lane, and The Avenue is a narrow, poorly surfaced thoroughfare that is marked as a private road and a public footpath. The proposed dwelling would be a single-storey, detached bungalow with access from the shared driveway currently serving the two new houses between the site and Oakfield Cottage.

Character and Appearance

5. The appeal site is located around 1 mile from the nearest village of Copdock. Between the main built-up area of Copdock and the site, there are isolated small pockets of development surrounded in the main by open countryside containing a mix of largely farmland and woodland. The area around the junction of Oakfield Road and The Avenue is open with the exception of a small group of buildings that includes Oakfield Cottage and the two new houses adjacent to it. The main A12 runs close to the rear boundary of Oakfield Cottage and beyond this is further open countryside.
6. Paragraph 78 of The Framework indicates that in order to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. It goes on in Paragraph 79 to indicate that planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of certain specified circumstances apply. The current proposal is in an isolated location, well removed from the village of Copdock, and it does not meet any of the criteria set out in Paragraph 79.
7. Copdock with Washbrook is classified as a "Hinterland Village" in the settlement hierarchy set out in Policy CS2 of the CS. Whilst elements of CS2 conflict with latest guidance in The Framework with regard to settlement boundaries, I have no reason to suppose that the overall hierarchy of settlements contained therein does not reflect the current situation. Policy CS11 of the CS relates to development in settlements and indicates that, with regard to "Hinterland Villages", development should, amongst other things, be adjacent or well related to the existing pattern of development for that settlement. Policy CS15 of the CS relates to the sustainability of development and indicates that development should respect the landscape, and make a positive contribution to the local character, shape and scale of the area.
8. In this case, the appeal site is not well related to the pattern of development around Copdock, and it would involve the addition of a further dwelling into an area that is largely open and rural in nature. The plot for the proposed dwelling, alongside the adjacent dwellings, would take on the appearance of an urban or suburban development, out of character with its wider surroundings.
9. The appellant contends that the Council only recently granted permission for the two new houses sited between Oakfield Cottage and the appeal site, and that the circumstances are similar to the current proposal. However, it would appear that, at the time of the earlier permission, the Council could not demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing as required by The Framework, and that a balancing exercise was therefore necessary to consider the benefits of additional housing against any adverse impacts. In that case, the Council found the balance in favour of the development of two houses. The Council apparently can now demonstrate over 6 years of housing, and the balancing exercise does not, therefore, apply. On this basis, Paragraphs 78 and 79 of the Framework are most relevant.

10. In conclusion on this issue, I find that the proposed dwelling would be harmful to the generally open, rural character of the surrounding countryside, and that the development would be in an isolated location, not well related to the settlement of Copdock. It would, on this basis, conflict with guidance in The Framework and with policies CS11 and CS15 of the CS.

Sustainability/accessibility

11. Policy CS15 of the CS indicates that development should seek to minimise the need to travel by car using the following hierarchy: walking, cycling, public transport, commercial vehicles and cars, thus improving air quality.
12. In this case, the appeal site is not well located with regard to the nearest village with facilities, which is Copdock. The appellant contends that the site is accessible, being within walking distance of the bus route on London Road, and cycling distance of the village and the retail park a few hundred metres further beyond Copdock. However, I note that The Avenue, which is marked as a private road and is the pedestrian route to London Road, is unsurfaced with large potholes and grass verges. It is also unlit, and is some 500-600 metres from London Road. I do not consider it convenient for pedestrians or cyclists. Moreover, while the eastbound bus stop is close to the junction of The Avenue with London Road, albeit across a busy dual carriageway, the westbound stop is some considerable distance further west. Finally, the bus service, is very infrequent and, therefore, inconvenient for occupiers of a property which would be a considerable distance away from the bus stops and would necessitate use of a poor quality and unlit footpath.
13. Another route to Copdock would be along Oakfield Road itself and thence via Church Lane to London Road. This is longer, and again the roads are unlit. Moreover, Oakfield Road is very narrow and has no footpaths. This alternative route would not be convenient for pedestrians or cyclists.
14. On this issue, I find that the proposed dwelling would not be readily accessible to local facilities and services by foot, cycle or by public transport. It would therefore, be most likely to require the occupiers to use their car(s) and this would result in a development both harmful to air quality and unsustainable by virtue of its location. On this basis, it would conflict with policy CS15 of the CS, and with guidance in paragraph 79 of The Framework.

Conclusion

15. I find that the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the countryside around Copdock, and that it would represent unsustainable development by virtue of its isolated location and lack of reasonable accessibility to local services and facilities. Accordingly, I dismiss this appeal.

J D Westbrook

INSPECTOR