



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 December 2020

by David Carter BSc MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1st February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/K0235/W/20/3244903

Land adjacent to High View, Wick End, Stagsden Bedford MK43 8TS

- 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 James & Laura Taylor against the decision of Bedford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 19/02119/FUL, dated 23 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 16 December 2019.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of three agricultural barns and the erection of two, four bed, one-&-half storey dwellings at land adjacent to High View, Wicks End, Stagsden.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development utilised above is as it appears on both the application form and the appeal form. I have determined the appeal on this basis rather than using the shorter description on the decision notice.
3. The appeal proposal is a resubmission that sought to address a previous refusal. The changes include reduction in the extent of hardstanding and garden sizes proposed.
4. The Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 was adopted on 15th January 2020 (BBLP) replacing the policies formerly set out in the Bedford Borough Local Plan (2002) and the Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan (2008). The development plan also comprises the saved policies within the Allocations & Designations Local Plan 2013 (ADLP). The Council Officer's report and the decision notice refer to the policies in the replaced plans. Notwithstanding this, both the Council and appellant have referred to the new BBLP policies in their evidence and I have determined the appeal on the basis of the up-to-date policies. The Council have commenced work on a review of the BBLP looking at growth beyond 2030 but, this is at the early stages of the process. A Neighbourhood Plan (NP) is being prepared for Stagsden with the latest available document being the results of the Issues and Options Survey published in 2017.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:
 - (i) the effects of the appeal proposal on the character and appearance of the

area and,

(ii) the housing proposed failing either to meet identified local housing need in the Parish of Stagsden or lead to the creation of mixed communities.

Reasons

Character and appearance

6. The appeal site is located on the southern edge of the hamlet of Wick End. The site is generally well-screened and sits at a lower level than the immediately adjoining properties to the north. The appeal scheme envisages the demolition of 3 agricultural barns, 2 of which benefit from Class Q prior approval (Ref: 18/00753/CPNQ) for conversion to 2 single storey dwellings to be replaced by 2, 4-bed detached dwellings. The site is situated outside the Settlement Policy Area boundary for Stagsden as identified on the Local Plan Policies Map. It is therefore regarded as open countryside for planning policy purposes with new development being steered in accordance with the settlement hierarchy.
7. The prior approval for the conversion under Class Q of the GPDO of 2 existing agricultural buildings to residential use establishes a fall-back position. However, while I would accept that the extent of the footprint of the proposed dwellings would be similar to the existing farm buildings, the nature of the Class Q conversions is that they would be considerably smaller both in overall floorspace, bulk and height than the proposed new dwellings. The Class Q conversions would also maintain the established development pattern and, most importantly, the rural character of the landholding. The appeal proposals would inevitably have a significantly greater urbanising effect in this countryside location.
8. I would not accept that the Class Q approvals signal that a redevelopment of the former agricultural buildings and significant intensification of new residential development would necessarily be appropriate in this location. Furthermore, while the site has been put forward for consideration as a potential housing site for up to 4 dwellings as part of the emerging NP, it is not appropriate for me to pre-empt the outcome of that plan-making process. Notwithstanding these points, the fall-back position would still enable 2 dwellings to be added to the stock of housing in the Borough on the appeal site.
9. I acknowledge that the appellants emphasise the quality of design of the appeal proposal vis-a-vis the existing run-down appearance of the agricultural buildings subject to the prior approval. However, it is important not to confuse the rationale whereby redundant agricultural buildings might be converted to rural dwellings under certain circumstances specified under the GDPO, that should not be seen as the precursor for redevelopment to provide a substantially different type of development.
10. The appellants have referred me to an earlier appeal on adjacent land at the Roost (APP/K0235/W/17/3191149). Although I do not have the details available to me, I note that proposal comprised the rebuilding of a storage building to form a new dwelling within a curtilage that related more closely to adjoining properties than the adjacent countryside. The circumstances were substantially different to the current appeal and, that decision was also made within a different policy context. Therefore, I have determined the current appeal on its merits.

11. Accordingly, I conclude that the appeal proposal would have a harmful effect on the rural character and appearance of the area through the location, scale, bulk and height of the proposed dwellings. As such, the proposed development would conflict with Policies 3S, 29 and 30 of the BBLP. Policy 3S establishes the spatial strategy including the settlement hierarchy and seeks to safeguard the intrinsic character of the countryside. Policies 29 and 30 seek, amongst other things, to ensure that new development is well-designed respecting the character of the area and local distinctiveness.

Local housing need

12. The appeal proposal would comprise 2 executive-style family-sized 4 bedroom detached dwellings. The proposed dwellings differ significantly in size from the extant Class Q approval which would comprise one, 2 bedroom property and a further one or 2 bedroom single storey property with the size and format determined through the conversion of the redundant agricultural buildings.
13. The Council have suggested that the size of dwellings which benefit from the prior approval would help to address locally identified needs in the 2016 Housing Needs Survey, enhance the mix of housing locally and steer away from further provision of larger executive-style accommodation at Wick End. The appellants disagree and suggest that the detailed survey information used by the Council was not in the public domain and should carry limited weight. Instead, they suggest that the identification of the appeal site in the emerging NP should carry weight in the decision.
14. Notwithstanding these points, the cover of the 2016 Housing Needs Survey indicates that it is the property of Stagsden Parish Council and Stagsden Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group so, there is little doubt in my mind that it is appropriate to this appeal. The appellants present the summary of the survey in an appendix to their Statement of Case. The highlights include support 'especially for smaller house types' as well as a strong preference for detached properties followed by bungalows and semi-detached dwellings. As I have already mentioned above, however, these remain matters to be resolved through the NP although, the desirability for a broader mix of dwelling sizes within Wick End, which would be brought about by the fall-back, would have merit. This is because, it would encourage a more balanced community and focus new housing provision on that part of the community in greater need for housing, as identified by survey work.
15. Accordingly, I find that the large dwellings proposed on the appeal site would not provide accommodation in accordance with identified need and, would extinguish significant community benefits arising from the size of dwellings that form the fall-back. As such, the appeal proposal is contrary to BBLP Policies 4S and 7S which seek, amongst other things, to ensure that the most appropriate provision of housing is made through Neighbourhood Development Plans responsive to identified community needs.

Other Matters and Planning Balance

16. Wick End Farmhouse is a Grade II Listed Building. As such, it is a designated heritage asset. There is also a partly filled moat which is a non-designated heritage asset.

17. Wick End Farmhouse derives historic and architectural interest through its 17th century origins, late 19th century more formalised additions and the broad use of vernacular materials. The moat to the north of the site is evidence of an earlier, defensible site reinforcing the status of the existing building and of the continuous inhabitation of the site. As highlighted in the Heritage Statement prepared by GC Planning Partnership Ltd, the proposed new dwellings would lie some distance to the south-east of both the Listed Building and moat. Separation by other existing buildings means there would not be any intervisibility. Therefore, I am satisfied there would be no harm to the significance of the setting of either Wick End Farmhouse or the non-designated moat as a consequence of the appeal proposal.
18. The appellants suggest there is not a five-year supply of housing land (5YHLS) whereas the Council's response is that the adoption of the new LP has resulted in the 5YHLS being increased to 5.4 years, going on to suggest that paragraph 11d) of the Framework would not be engaged in relation to the determination of this appeal.
19. Notwithstanding the Council's view, even if I were to accept there is not currently a 5YHLS and paragraph 11d) of the Framework was engaged in relation to the appeal proposal then this would not result in a net increase to the stock of dwellings compared to the fall-back position. Therefore, the benefits of the appeal proposal would be restricted to the difference between the provision of 2 large new dwellings, in place of 2 smaller Class Q prior approval conversions. This would lead to some additional economic benefits through construction and possibly through a higher degree of potential usage of local facilities through the accommodation of larger households.
20. However, the BBLP policies referenced under the main issues are recently adopted and are up to date against the approach in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework. Accordingly, I find that the proposed development would be contrary to the LP as a whole and the additional benefits of the appeal proposal arising from the construction of the 2 new 4 bedroom detached dwellings would be outweighed by the totality of harm identified above.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons stated above the appeal is dismissed.

David Carter

INSPECTOR