



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 24 May 2021

by Andrew Smith BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3rd June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/P0240/W/21/3268155

141 Grange Road, Blunham MK44 3NT

- 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 S Hodges against the decision of Central Bedfordshire Council.
 - The application Ref CB/20/02639/FULL, dated 29 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 20 October 2020.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing dwelling followed by the erection of three detached dwellings with integral garages, access, parking provision, landscaping and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Pre-Submission version of the emerging Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015-2035 (the CBLP) was submitted to the Secretary of State in April 2018. Whilst the examination process is continuing, there is nothing before me to indicate that the CBLP is currently at a stage that should attract anything more than limited weight. I shall consider the appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

3. The effect upon the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. Policy DM4 of the Central Bedfordshire Core Strategy and Development Management Policies (November 2009) (the CBCSDMP), through the identification of Settlement Envelopes, differentiates the built-up areas of settlements from areas of countryside situated beyond. The site sits divorced from Blunham's defined Settlement Envelope and thus falls within the countryside as defined in local planning policy terms
5. The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) (the Framework) does not imply that protection from development be given to the countryside in its totality, rather that valued landscapes be protected and enhanced and that recognition should be given to the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
6. When compared to the approach set out in the Framework, Policy DM4 is more restrictive in seeking to control development beyond the District's Settlement Envelopes. Nevertheless, Policy DM4 does not explicitly prevent all types of development outside of defined envelopes where no land is available within a

settlement and proposed development adjacent to it would make best use of available land and lead to more sustainable communities. Policy DM4 accommodates rural development based on objectives that are broadly consistent with the Framework and is thus a policy that attracts moderate weight.

7. The appeal site currently contains a large single detached dwelling that is set within spacious and verdant grounds. Indeed, the site's immediate surroundings tend to be well-vegetated and are often clear of built development. Even so, several residential properties are located near to the site. These are often loosely positioned and set upon sometimes expansive plots in the context of wider rural surroundings, as well as upon a range of orientations and building lines. There is thus a spacious, green and informal residential character and appearance in place local to the site.
8. It is intended that the existing dwelling be demolished and replaced by three sizeable dwellings rising to two full stories. These would be positioned around a central courtyard and subdivisions of the site would occur to create three separate private garden spaces. Notwithstanding the existing dwelling's particularly large size, the composition of the appeal site would fundamentally alter. Moreover, the extent of footprint coverage proposed, when combined with the considerable bulk and mass of each new dwelling intended, would noticeably erode the site's spaciousness. This is even when acknowledging that some single storey elements are proposed.
9. I do not dispute that the heights of the proposed dwellings would be lower than the height of the existing dwelling and would be broadly consistent with other building heights in the vicinity. However, despite the prevalence of large dwellings locally, it is the quantum and cumulative scale of development proposed that raises concerns. Indeed, whilst the site occupies a relatively discreet and well-contained rural location accessed off a private drive, the proposal would still influence the manner in which the site and its immediate surroundings would be read and experienced (most particularly by local residents).
10. Various density/site coverage calculations appear within the evidence before me. The appellant has sought to draw direct comparisons in these terms between the appeal scheme and Nos 139 and 141A Grange Road. However, these other single plots cannot, in isolation, be considered to set a suitable benchmark for a redevelopment of the appeal site. This is even when factoring in the recent planning history¹ that relates to No 141A. Indeed, the composition of other far more spacious residential plots also influence the character and appearance of the local area. These include No 143 Grange Road (even though the principal building obstructs rear garden views) and the property that adjoins the site's southern edge.
11. My attention has been drawn to existing examples of courtyard layouts already in place along Grange Road. I also note that such a layout would be broadly reflective of a traditional arrangement of agricultural buildings. However, the courtyard design approach that has been taken would not disguise the fact that an overly dense and intensive residential redevelopment of the site is proposed. This would be the case despite the intended use of varied hard surfaces.

¹ CB/17/01269/FULL; CB/18/01726/FULL; CB/20/01499/LDCP

12. The tree removals necessitated by the scheme would be noteworthy in extent. Moreover, whilst no veteran, ancient or particularly high-value individual specimen would be impacted upon, the tree removals, when considered in a cumulative sense, would have the effect of further exposing the site and weakening the verdancy of its appearance when experienced from a variety of local vantage points. This would exacerbate the scheme's negative effects in a character and appearance sense. Whilst new soft landscaping is proposed, this would take time to properly establish and would not, to my mind, suitably mitigate for the intended losses of numerous established trees.
13. For the above reasons, the scheme would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. The proposal conflicts with Policies CS14, DM3 and DM4 the CBCSDMP in so far as these policies require all new development to be appropriate in scale and design and to respect local context. The proposal also fails to accord with the guidance contained within the Central Bedfordshire Design Guide (September 2014) in so far as it requires development to be sympathetic in terms of the surrounding built form.

Other Matters

14. I have noted objections/concerns raised by interested parties with respect to matters including highway safety, noise impacts and the potential for overshadowing and loss of privacy to arise. However, as I have found the proposal to be unacceptable for other reasons, it is not necessary for me to explore these matters further here.

Planning Balance

15. For the avoidance of doubt, on the basis that the most important policies for determining this appeal are not out-of-date, I have not applied the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
16. In terms of the scheme's benefits, it is the case that two additional residential units would result that would be situated reasonably close to a range of local facilities and services. The Framework reaffirms the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes. Nevertheless, the provision of two additional units would not make a noticeable difference to the District-wide housing supply situation and is thus a benefit that attracts limited weight. The scheme would also create jobs during the construction phase and provide support to the local economy and local community facilities once occupied. However, these benefits also attract limited weight due to the relatively modest scale of development under consideration.
17. The proposal would utilise an expansive area of residential garden land that sits divorced from the northern edge of Blunham's defined Settlement Envelope in a semi-rural location set away from the built-up area of the village. In this sense, the site meets the Framework's definition of previously developed land. Nevertheless, as it is located to the outer periphery of a rural settlement, I attach moderate weight to the benefits associated with making an effective use of the land.
18. Particularly when noting the various tree removals that are intended, any ecological enhancement that could ultimately be delivered would be anticipated to be slight and is attractive of limited weight as a potential scheme benefit.

19. The contributions associated with the delivery and subsequent occupation of the proposal would, when considered in cumulative terms, be relatively modest and would not outweigh the significant harm to the character and appearance of the area and associated policy conflicts that I have identified. The proposal conflicts with the development plan when read as a whole, and material considerations do not lead me to a decision otherwise.

Conclusion

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

Andrew Smith

INSPECTOR