



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 22 June 2021

by A Owen MA BA(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 01 July 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/W/21/3270455

The Plot, Manor Farm Road, Waresley SG19 3BX

- 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 Ms Melanie Banks against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00771/FUL, dated 27 April 2020, was refused by notice dated 15 January 2021.
 - The development proposed is a new dwelling including site access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issues is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including the setting of the Waresley Conservation Area (WCA).

Reasons

3. The site comprises a small field on the north side of Manor Farm Road. To its west, and opposite it, there are other houses. To its rear and its east there is open farmland. All of its borders are demarked by well established hedgerows.
4. The settlement of Waresley is limited in scale and facilities. It is focussed on the church and pub and primarily comprises the properties which line the B1040 as it winds through the settlement, along with a number of houses stretched along Manor Farm Road. Indeed, the site is closer to the centre of Waresley than many of the other homes further west along Manor Farm Road.
5. There is dispute as to whether the site is within the built-up part of Waresley. I have not been provided with any policy map which shows any formal boundary to Waresley and the only definition provided by the Council is in the Glossary to Huntingdonshire's Local Plan (HLP) which states that land which relates more to the buildings rather than to the surrounding countryside is considered to form part of the built-up area.
6. I consider that, despite the site being wholly grassed, the plot does relate more to the dwellings to the west and south than to the farmland to the north and east. Its small size, compared to the larger fields beyond it, means it appears distinct from that land and its separation from those fields is emphasised by the boundary hedgerows. Conversely the trees and hedgerows along its road side boundary are consistent with the other vegetation in front of other houses on Manor Farm Road. As such the appeal site is part of the built-up area.

7. However the proposal would involve the removal of a section of the hedgerow on the eastern boundary and the laying of a stone and tarmac access track, above the ground, across the neighbouring field to the east to an access point opposite Water End House. As noted above, this field forms part of the wider open countryside. There is no strong visual boundary between it and the larger fields to the north and it is considerably larger in size than the appeal site. As such this land is not part of the built-up area and hence the development as a whole would project into the countryside.
8. The access track would represent an urbanising form of development in the countryside. It would have a limited impact on views from the B1040 to the north, but it would be very apparent from Manor Farm Road. From here, its appearance and its use by domestic traffic would contrast with the undeveloped character and appearance of the countryside which surrounds Waresley. I understand the access has been so located to provide maximum visibility for vehicles exiting the site and to avoid tree removal. Nonetheless, I have no evidence before me to demonstrate access from within the appeal site would be less safe or cannot be provided without removing valuable trees.
9. The effect on the setting of the WCA would be similar. The site is located adjacent to the boundary of the WCA which runs along the west and south boundaries of the plot. The WCA roughly encompasses the whole of the settlement and hence the land surrounding it is primarily open and undeveloped agricultural fields. It is this setting which contributes strongly to the significance of the WCA, rather than the trees and hedgerows on the site boundaries. The access, by crossing the field to the east of the plot, would detract from its open and undeveloped character and hence detrimentally affect the setting of the WCA. This would cause harm, albeit less than substantial, to the significance of the WCA.
10. The dwelling itself would be clearly visible from positions along the B1040 to the north due to the openness in between and the slight rise of the land towards the site. However from this position, many of the houses along Manor Farm Road are visible, including Fairfield House, Vine House and Water End House. Against this background a house would not appear inharmonious. The Council do not raise objection to the design of the building, and I have no reason to disagree. The dwelling would have no harmful effect on the setting of the WCA as the plot does not provide the same open setting to the WCA as the other land surrounding the WCA.
11. Policy LP9 of the HLP supports some forms of development on sites outside, but well related to, the built-up area of small settlements. The explanatory text clarifies these as being development which supports the rural economy, community facilities, tourism, rural exception housing and water based development. Although the appellant states the development would house a director of Manor Farm they accept that the dwelling would not meet any of these criteria. As such this policy does not support the development.
12. The appellant highlights a planning permission granted in 1972 for a dwelling on the site. Yet the passage of time that has passed and various iterations of planning policy since, means this does not support the development either.
13. In summary, the proposal as a whole would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and the setting of the WCA. Consequently, it would conflict with HLP policies LP2 and LP10 which require development to have

regard to the character of the countryside; LP9, LP11 and LP12 which expect development to respond to the character and context of the locality, and LP34 which gives great weight to the conservation of heritage assets. It would also contrast with the aims of the Huntingdonshire Design Guide which aims to help development make a positive contribution to the character of the area.

14. Paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires that where less than substantial harm is found to the significance of a heritage asset, that harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In this case, the public benefits are limited as the proposal would provide just one additional unit to the Council's housing supply. It would be a low energy dwelling, would support the running of Manor Farm, and a wildflower meadow would be created. However, these are of limited value to the wider public. Overall, the public benefits would be limited and they do not outweigh the harm set out above.

Other Matters

15. The Council also objected to the development on the grounds that a planning obligation had not been provided securing a financial contribution to the provision of wheeled bins. A signed unilateral undertaking has now been provided which seeks to secure £150 for this provision. The Council have not commented on this undertaking. As I have dismissed the appeal for other reasons, and as this is mitigation rather than a benefit of the development, it is not necessary for me to consider this obligation further.

Conclusion

16. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations which lead me to a decision other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, the appeal should be dismissed.

A Owen

INSPECTOR