



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 December 2021

by Jonathan Price BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI DMS

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 December 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/W/21/3273542

Hill House, Norwich Road, Wetheringsett cum Brockford, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 5NS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs M Parker against the decision of Mid Suffolk District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/20/05630, dated 8 December 2020, was refused by notice dated 11 February 2021.
 - The development proposed is erection of 2no dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The application was made in outline, with all detailed matters reserved for later consideration apart from access. I have dealt with the appeal accordingly.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this appeal are whether the proposal would be appropriate in respect of:
 - development plan policy for the location of housing, and
 - the character and appearance of the area, including the setting of the adjacent grade II listed Turnpike cottages.

Reasons

Development plan policy

4. The two dwellings would be on land to the rear of Hill House, a historic property of a vernacular design that fronts the A140. Access would be from one of a pair of existing entrances, the other serving the host property and an adjacent timber clad barn. The latter has permission to be converted into a single dwelling. Along with the next-door Turnpike cottages, a historic dwelling that is thatched and grade II listed, the development here is set a significant distance apart from the main settlement of Wetheringsett. This lies beyond intervening farmland to the east of the A140, with facilities including a primary school, church and village hall. There is a significant cluster of housing nearer to the appeal site, further to the north at Brockford Street, where minor roads join the A140 and there is a motor vehicle workshop with filling station and small shop.

5. The development plan policies relevant to this proposal are those in the 1998 Mid Suffolk Local Plan¹ (LP), the 2008 Core Strategy² (CS) and the 2012 CS Focused Review³ (CSFR). The appeal site is outside the settlement boundary defined for Wetheringsett and lies quite clearly within what is countryside and classed as such for development plan policy purposes. The proposal conflicts with policies CS1 and 2, which restrict developments in the countryside to those supporting the rural economy, meeting affordable housing needs or of other defined categories not applicable here.
6. The proposal also conflicts with LP Policy H7, which imposes strict control over proposals for new housing outside settlement boundaries in the interests of protecting the existing character and appearance of the countryside. This is apart from replacement dwellings, residential conversions and key agricultural worker accommodation supported under Policy H10.
7. The proposal would conflict with the adopted spatial strategy and plan led approach to the location of new housing, undermining its objectives to protect the character and appearance of the countryside from the adverse impacts of sporadic development. Such a spatial strategy and plan led approach supports the objectives for sustainable development, subsequently central within the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and provided for in Mid-Suffolk by CSFR policies FC1 and FC1.1.
8. Sustainable development is sought to be achieved through relating housing growth with the availability of services and infrastructure, reducing a need for travel and encouraging movements by sustainable modes. Occupiers of the proposed dwellings would here be highly dependent on private car use to meet regularly required needs, as few of the services and facilities providing for these exist nearby. Any that do, such as bus stops, are set apart by a stretch of the busy A140 that is without footways or lighting. The opportunities to reach the services and facilities available nearby, either the limited amount at Brockford Street or the wider range in places further beyond, are not conveniently, safely or realistically accessible by walking or cycling, particularly after dark or in bad weather.
9. The appellant refers to the Council having granted permission for housing in less accessible and more remote locations than this. I have taken this into account and considered the evidence provided. However, in my view the site at Hill House is not a location where the occupiers of further housing would have the benefit of convenient access to regularly required services other than by means of frequent journeys by private car. Regardless of other planning decisions the Council might have recently made, this does not alter my view that this would therefore not be an appropriate location for two further dwellings. The conflict with the adopted spatial strategy and plan led approach to the location of new housing gives rise to a finding of significant harm.

Character and appearance and setting of Turnpike cottages

10. Set behind the host dwelling, the two housing plots would comprise an atypical tandem arrangement of housing, whatever reserved matters details were potentially forthcoming. Such details might not result in a scheme that would

¹ Mid Suffolk Local Plan adopted September 1998.

² Mid Suffolk Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document adopted September 2008.

³ Mid Suffolk Local Development Framework Core Strategy Focused Review adopted December 2021.

be considered cramped. Nonetheless, two dwellings of whatever design would in this location be out of character with the prevailing road fronting development. The scheme would comprise the rather incongruous spread of housing away from the road in a situation where just the two existing dwellings provide no firm context for any further development and where such an arrangement bears no relationship with any pre-existing pattern.

11. The proposal for two dwellings on this site would not reflect the prevailing character and appearance of the area. This brings this scheme into conflict with Policy CS5 and LP policies GP1, H13 and H15. The harm from the conflict with these policies is tempered by the fact these dwellings would not be prominent in the street scene and so is moderate in degree.
12. From the listing description, the special interest of the next-door listed building derives mainly from its historic and archaeological character. However, the two dwellings would intrude within the mainly open rural setting to Turnpike cottages, thus detracting from how this building's special interest is appreciated as a rather isolated historic dwelling within the countryside. Intervisibility between the appeal site and the next door listed house is limited presently by tall tree growth. Nevertheless, the failure of the proposal to preserve the setting of the grade II listed Turnpike cottages gives rise to a conflict with Policy CS5 and LP Policy HB1. Whilst the harm would be less than substantial, I must nonetheless give this considerable importance and weight.

Planning balance and conclusion

13. The development plan policies in Mid Suffolk that restrict housing in the countryside lean towards blanket protection and are somewhat out of step with the more flexible and balanced approach subsequently found in the Framework. The Council accepts that, for this reason, the policies most important for determining the appeal are in this regard out of date. This would engage the presumption in favour of sustainable development in paragraph 11 d) of the Framework.
14. The heritage balance in Framework paragraph 202 must first be applied. This states that where a development will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, as in this case, this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Paragraph 199 preceding this states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Set against this, the public benefits of the scheme are small, through two dwellings making only a minimal contribution towards boosting housing supply.
15. The economic benefits of the scheme, from the construction of the dwellings and the additional household expenditure in support of existing local services, would also be very small. Occupiers of two further dwellings in this location would be highly dependent on private car journeys to meet regularly required needs. This I have concluded to be a harm. However, even if this site were to be considered an accessible location for further housing, which clearly it is not, this would be an absence of harm, rather than a matter that provided any environmental benefits.
16. Such small public benefits are clearly outweighed by the harm that would be caused to the setting of Turnpike cottages. Therefore, paragraph 11 d i) is

engaged, as the application of Framework policies that protect designated heritage assets would in this case provide a clear reason for refusing the development.

17. The proposal would therefore not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development provided by the Framework. As a material consideration, this would thus not indicate this appeal be decided other than in accordance with the development plan, where I find there to be conflict when considered as a whole. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Jonathan Price

Inspector