



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 January 2022

by Alison Scott (BA Hons) Dip TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 09 February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/21/3284251

Land North of High Fair, Wooler, Northumberland, NE71 6PA

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant approval to details required by a condition of a planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Fergusons Blyth Limited against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
- The application Ref 20/04369/REM, dated 18 December 2020, sought approval of details pursuant to conditions Nos 1, 2 and 5 of a planning permission Ref 13/00802/OUT granted on 6 December 2017.
- The application was refused by notice dated 9 April 2021.
- The development proposed is Reserved Matters application in accordance with conditions 1, 2 and 5 - seeking approval of layout, scale, appearance, and landscaping, including details of materials/finishes (residential development of up to 6 dwellings) pursuant to planning permission 13/00802/OUT.
- The details for which approval is sought are: Appearance, landscaping, layout and scale.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary and Procedural Matters

2. The Northumberland Local Plan 2019 is progressing towards adoption and will replace the Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Local Plan 1999. However, the Local Plan is the extant development plan for the local area, and the saved policies carry significant weight.
3. The principle of residential development at the site has previously been determined as permission was granted in outline for up to thirty-six dwellings with details of access forming part of the outline approval. I have no reason to dispute the findings of the Council in respect of this outline permission. Matters pertaining to layout, scale, appearance and landscaping form reserved matters.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the local area and surrounding landscape.

Reasons

5. This proposal is for six dwellings to be located on an undulating parcel of grassed land. The Council confirm this land to be part of the settlement. It is just beyond the existing built-up areas of Wooler to the west of the village.

6. The appeal site immediately adjoins the residential development of High Fair and Broomey Road, originally built as a planned housing estate on the edge of the village. Consisting of predominantly terrace blocks of two storey houses, they are largely uniform in design and character, built in a tight grain. There is a slightly looser grain of housing along Common Road with its older and more traditional semi-detached and bungalow properties, although the immediate area consists of a typical village character of built-up development before the rural fringe transitions.
7. The proposed six large detached houses would be set in wide spacious plots, generously spaced from one another. Although the houses are intended to be a separate commodity to those of the neighbouring housing estate, they would be closely associated with the adjacent built development. Whilst the design is intended to be of its own character, their layout, scale and massing would be severely at odds with the adjacent built environment of very ordered, moderately sized and dense housing.
8. There may be other local dwellings commensurate to the size of those of the appeal houses, and there may be some dwellings located on the fringes of the village that the appellant points to as examples of similar development. However, their precise details are not before me to compare and in any event, I am considering the proposal before me on its own specific context and merits.
9. To this end, whilst the outline proposal for up to thirty-six houses was deemed to be acceptable in principle by the Council, the effect on the landscape would be considered as part of the reserved matters stage.
10. The appellant confirms the design has been informed by the topography of the land. They propose less cut and fill engineering operations to construct six houses. Given the levels of the land with proposed reduced cut and fill operations, the large scale of houses with some incorporating split levels into their design, as well as raised ridge lines with habitable space within the attic level, and their positions on the site, I do not share the Council's view that the development would be unlikely to be visible beyond the local area in long range views towards the site. Rather, as a combination of these identified factors, taking into account the open nature of the site and its exposure from the wider countryside to which these houses would be seen, it would not relate to its local environment but instead appear visually intrusive and detrimentally impact upon the intrinsic character of the countryside.
11. Even though fourteen units may have been approved planning permission more recently by the Council, and this is less than the maximum number approved at outline stage, nonetheless, fourteen houses is more than double the number of houses at appeal before me, and therefore cannot be compared. Furthermore, the details of the approved houses are not before me to comment on comparisons between the two schemes. Nor is there information to allow me to compare effects on the landscape between these two developments.
12. With regards to less cut and fill required when erecting six houses on the site, there are no details presented of how the reduced number of units at appeal would be 'efficient', to allow me to comment upon. Nor have details of how the proposal would be an improvement to local 'build quality' been provided.
13. The proposal may offer a choice of housing stock for potential buyers. A self-build initiative has been pointed to by the appellant although further details

have not been forthcoming, or details of how the units would be secured as affordable homes.

14. The Covid-19 pandemic may have a bearing on people's general working environments and the appellant explains this has influenced the layout of the proposed homes that have also been designed to take advantage of valley views, together with amenity space and pedestrian routes through the site. However, none of these factors would lead me to reach an alternative decision on the matter.
15. Therefore, to conclude on this main issue, the proposed dwellings would not relate to their surroundings causing harm to the character and appearance of the local area and the views from the wider countryside contrary to Policies F1 and F3 of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Local Plan 1999 in their aims to protect local character and the landscape. In addition, it would be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in its objectives to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

Other Matters

16. The appellant comments within their Statement of Case that they are of the view that the relevant policies of the development plan most important for determining the appeal, are out of date.
17. Local Plan Policy F1 relates to sustaining and enhancing the Borough's natural and built environment. Policy F3 also aims to conserve or enhance the countryside within areas of high landscape value and lists criteria to assess development against. Both policies are 'saved' policies and I consider to be consistent with the Framework, in particular its objectives to conserve and enhance the natural environment. Consequently, I have applied full weight to these important development plan policies in my decision making.
18. Vehicular access formed part of the outline planning permission and therefore this has been considered earlier. It requires no further assessment as part of this appeal.

Conclusion

19. Due to the harm arising to the character and appearance of the area and landscape, the proposed development would lead to conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no material considerations that indicate the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

Alison Scott

INSPECTOR

