



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 March 2022

by A Caines BSc (Hons) MScTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25th March 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/21/3289228

Land South of Centurion Way, Heddon-on-the-Wall NE15 0BY

- 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 Aidan Hamilton (Hamilton Willis Land and Development Ltd) against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 20/03389/FUL, dated 9 October 2020, was refused by notice dated 17 June 2021.
 - The development proposed is residential development of four dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. It is evident that the proposal underwent a number of amendments during the course of its consideration by the Council. For the avoidance of doubt, I have determined the appeal based on the amended plans that the Council used to make its decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is an area of undeveloped land on the south side of Centurion Way. Although it is part of a larger field that falls steeply away to the south, it is within the settlement boundary of Heddon-on-the-Wall and is flanked by houses on three sides. There is no dispute between the main parties that the site is suitable for housing development and I note that planning permission has previously been granted for housing on the site, albeit some time ago and for a fewer number of dwellings.
5. As set out in the appellant's Character Area Study, this part of the village experienced significant residential expansion in the 1960s. More recent housing developments have taken place on smaller individual sites, and includes some contemporary developments. As a result, the area is distinctly residential in nature with a mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced houses, including bungalows. These are generally set back from the front boundary with established front gardens, but there is a wide variety in architectural styles and use of materials.
6. The sloping topography heavily influences the character of the area, with housing that steps down the hillside. The proposal would reflect this through

the split level design of the houses. From the front, their design and scale would be similar to other bungalows in the area. This, in combination with the set back from the road, and spacing that has been purposely designed to coincide with the location of the public benches within the grass verge, would ensure that the houses would not appear over-dominant, both in terms of the street scene and in the outlook from the houses opposite. The rear of the houses would appear more contemporary in approach with large amounts of glazing. However, these would be seen in the context of a suburban housing estate which contains enough variety to accommodate a range of design treatments without detracting from the character of the area. Accordingly, I do not share the concerns of the Council and local residents in these regards.

7. Nonetheless, matters of design and layout are not limited to just the houses. Indeed, paragraph 21 of the National Design Guide states that a well-designed place is unlikely to be achieved by focussing only on the appearance, materials and detailing of buildings. Paragraph 86 goes on to state that well-designed parking is attractive, well-landscaped and sensitively integrated into the built form so that it does not dominate the development or the street scene.
8. The vehicular access points from Centurion Way have been limited to two small openings in an attempt to retain the majority of the roadside hedge, which is a positive natural feature and should rightly be retained. However, the space required for parking and manoeuvring would lead to the entire area at the front of the houses being hard surfaced with little prospect of any meaningful soft landscaping being introduced within this part of the site. Even with the use of high quality paving materials, this wide and deep expanse of hard surfacing across the whole of the site frontage would have a harsh and sterile appearance. It would run contrary to the established grain of individual plots with front gardens and result in a development that does not integrate comfortably with its surroundings.
9. Whilst the hedge has potential to offer some screening, the harmful effect would still be visible through the access points, from the upper floors of nearby properties, and from higher up on Centurion Way. In any event, landscaping should not be relied upon to hide poor development. It can also die, or be removed for other reasons. Indeed, the extent and proximity of this hard surfacing to the hedge brings its long term retention prospects into serious doubt.
10. For these particular reasons, I conclude that the development would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area. Thus, the proposal conflicts with saved Policy H15 of the Castle Morpeth District Local Plan 2003 (LP) insofar as it requires development to be compatible with its surroundings and not highway dominated. These requirements are consistent with paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which seeks to ensure that developments are visually attractive and will add to the overall quality of the area, and against which I find further conflict. Furthermore, paragraph 134 of the Framework states development that is not well designed should be refused.
11. The submissions also make reference to Policy QOP1 of the emerging Northumberland Local Plan (NLP). Whilst the NLP is at an advanced stage of its preparation, it has not yet been adopted and Policy QOP1 does not significantly

change the approach in the adopted plan. It is also subject to modifications. As such, this policy has limited bearing on my Decision.

Other Matters

12. My attention has been drawn to an application for an agricultural building which gained prior approval on the land immediately behind the appeal site. It has been suggested that, if constructed, this building would have a greater impact on the character and visual amenity of the area due to its scale and massing. A draft planning obligation has been provided which sets out that the agricultural building would not be constructed if planning permission were to be granted for the houses. However, notwithstanding it is an entirely different nature of development, on a different site, and that the planning obligation is not complete, I have identified harm for other reasons which would not arise from the agricultural building. Accordingly, it is not a factor which leads me to reach a different conclusion.
13. I have noted the representations from interested parties on matters not covered in the main issue, but as I am dismissing the appeal for other substantive reasons it is not necessary to explore those matters any further as it would not alter the appeal outcome.

Conclusion

14. There is no dispute that the Council is able to demonstrate a housing land supply in excess of 5 years. However, that does not negate the benefits of additional housing supply, including social and economic benefits from construction, support for local services and expenditure from future occupiers. Having regard to the scale of the development, these are factors in the scheme's favour which amount to limited public benefits.
15. Conversely, the development would cause harm to local character and appearance, and subsequently would conflict with requirements of saved Policy H15 of the LP. Due to consistency with the Framework, I have afforded significant weight to this conflict.
16. The proposal would therefore conflict with the development plan taken as a whole and there are no other considerations, including the Framework, that outweigh this conflict.
17. Accordingly, and for the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A Caines

INSPECTOR