



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 April 2022

by Andrew Owen MA BA(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4th May 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/Y2430/W/21/3283923

Home Farm, 11 Main Street, Branston NG32 1RU

- 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 Anthony Haslem of Belvoir Estates Ltd against the decision of Melton Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20/01064/FUL, dated 10 September 2020, was refused by notice dated 7 April 2021.
 - The development proposed is conversion of redundant barns to 2 dwellings with parking areas.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are whether the development would be suitably located having regard to its access to services and facilities by sustainable modes of transport, and whether there is a demonstrable local need for the proposal.

Reasons

Location

3. Branston is a small rural settlement. There is a pub adjacent to the site and a church further along Main Street, but no other facilities or services for day to day living.
4. Croxton Kerrial is around a mile away and is designated in the Melton Local Plan (2018) as a service centre because it has a greater range of facilities. Although Branston is within the same parish as Croxton Kerrial and is within the area covered by the emerging neighbourhood plan, the two settlements are distinctly separate. Due to the distance between the appeal site and Croxton Kerrial, most trips to access the services and facilities there by future residents of the development would be highly likely to be undertaken by cars. Indeed, Croxton Kerrial does not have an extensive range of facilities itself, and it may be that if future occupiers of the development need to drive for some needs, they may well choose to drive to larger settlements further afield, such as Grantham, to access an even greater range of facilities or services.
5. The appellant refers to a bus service set up by some local residents, but there is no substantive evidence of this, and from the information provided, it may just be a school bus service. I also understand the church is being used as a community centre and that there are plans for a village shop in Branston. While these are all laudable, and may help to reduce some reliance on private cars,

the overwhelming majority of trips, such as for employment, shopping, healthcare or leisure, would remain to be by car which is not a sustainable mode of transport.

6. As such, in this respect, the development would not be suitably located and so would fail to accord with policy SS3 of the Local Plan which says that residential development on unallocated sites must be served by sustainable infrastructure.

Local need

7. Policy SS3 also states that new residential development would be supported where it meets a proven local need as identified by substantive evidence. It gives some examples of such evidence including neighbourhood plans or a housing assessment.
8. The Croxton Kerrial & Branston Neighbourhood Plan (NP) has been subject of public consultation, but it is yet to be examined or adopted. As such it carries limited weight. In any case, in the draft version provided, it shows that in the period 2016 to 2021 there was a need for two affordable 2-bed bungalows in Branston, which the development would not provide. I recognise, however, that the plan also showed local support for the conversion of dilapidated barns, which may include that at the appeal site.
9. The policy does allow for other substantive evidence to be provided to demonstrate local need, and the appellant states that they have a demand for housing for their own employees across the Vale of Belvoir. Their evidence states they employ up to 100 people and own around 330 properties with around 40 being re-let each year. Notwithstanding the fact that it is not clear why the appellant has to find accommodation for its employees, the figures would suggest there is ample accommodation, albeit not available currently. Moreover the demand spans the whole of the Vale of Belvoir so is not necessarily local to Melton Borough or Branston.
10. Whilst there is clearly local support for the scheme, as highlighted by the Parish Council's letter of support, petition of local residents, and the responses to the NP consultation, there is little substantive evidence of local need. The fact that the Council can demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing land, which the appellant does not dispute, lends support to my view. As such, for this reason also, the development would conflict with policy SS3.

Other Considerations

11. The explanatory text to Local Plan Policy SS2 states that schemes of up to three dwellings in rural settlement may be appropriate. However, the text is clear that this does not absolve the need for such developments to help to sustain local services, an aim which is reflected in paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework'), or meet identified needs. The support two houses would provide to local services either in Branston or Croxton Kerrial would be limited and, as set out above, there is no identified local need. The development would hence fail to accord with Policy SS2 too.
12. The Council's conservation officer agrees with the appellant that the main barn, which dates from the 19th century, is a non-designated heritage asset. The submitted heritage statement suggests the barn is highly significant for architectural and historic reasons, which the Council do not dispute. Paragraph 203 of the Framework advises that the effect of a proposal on a non-

designated heritage asset must be considered taking account of the scale of the loss and the significance of the asset.

13. I saw from my site visit that the barn is in a state of disrepair, and it is reasonable to assume that, without reuse, over time it would continue to deteriorate to a point where it is beyond conversion. The potential loss of this significant non-designated heritage asset would be very regrettable.
14. However, the structural appraisal states that the structural condition of the existing barn is excellent. As such the loss of the asset would not appear to be imminent and this development therefore not critical to its preservation. Nonetheless, clearly the works would improve the function and appearance of the asset and would most likely represent the most viable reuse of the building. I give that moderate weight.
15. The site is within the Branston Conservation Area (BCA). Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.
16. The existing barn, even in its dilapidated state, makes a positive contribution to the BCA. Therefore, although the conversion works would improve its appearance and so would enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, the BCA's character and appearance would be preserved without any development taking place. Consequently, the additional benefit of the development, in enhancing the character and appearance of the BCA, is modest.

Planning balance and Conclusion

17. The development would fail to be suitably located with respect to its accessibility to services and facilities by sustainable means, and would not meet an identified local need. Balanced against that is the benefit of the improvements to this significant non-designated heritage asset and the enhancement of the BCA.
18. Overall I consider the harms resulting from the development and the conflict with development plan policies outweigh the benefits. The proposal would fail to accord with the development plan taken as a whole and the other material considerations do not suggest the decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan.
19. Therefore, for the reasons given above, and taking account of all other considerations, the appeal is dismissed.

Andrew Owen

INSPECTOR