



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 May 2022

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6th June 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/G0908/W/22/3290510

Land adjacent Brooklea, Aikton, Wigton, Cumbria, CA7 0JA

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant permission in principle.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs N Thomlinson against the decision of Allerdale Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PIP/2021/0001, dated 9 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 23 July 2021.
 - The development proposed is residential development.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Planning Practice Guidance explains that the Town and Country Planning (Permission in Principle) (Amendment) Order 2017 (the Order) is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development which separates the consideration of matters of principle for the proposed development from the technical detail. The scope of the first stage, that is to establish whether a site is suitable in principle for development, is limited to location, land use and amount of development.

Main Issues

3. Therefore, the main issue is whether the site is suitable for new residential development, having regard to its location.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is part of a large undeveloped agricultural field with a road frontage between Brooklea and Bakewell House. It is in Aikton, which is a small rural village comprising a loose aggregation of dwellings and building groups interspersed with undeveloped agricultural land in the countryside.
5. Policy S3 of Allerdale Borough Council Local Plan (Part 1) Strategic and Development Management Policies Adopted July 2014 (the LP) sets out the Council's spatial strategy. This seeks to locate new housing in the towns and villages according to the settlement hierarchy. Outside of the defined settlements, housing development is required to meet listed criteria which include essential rural worker dwellings and rural exception sites.
6. The village of Aikton does not have an identified settlement boundary and it is not listed as a suitable settlement for new residential development. The proposal would not be rural workers dwellings nor would it be affordable

- housing to meet an identified local need. The proposal would not be of a type considered acceptable in this location.
7. The proposal would not be the development of isolated homes in the countryside. However, the location is remote from services and facilities and future occupiers would therefore need to travel to meet their basic daily needs. In this regard, the site is roughly 5km from the key service centre of Wigton. The intervening roads are rural, with no footways or streetlighting and subject to the national speed limit. Taking into account the distance involved, future occupiers would be unlikely to access services in Wigton by walking. While the distance would be manageable by cycling, it seems similarly unlikely that future occupiers would routinely access shops and services this way. Aikton is poorly served by public transport, other than a school bus. Consequently, sustainable forms of transport are not a realistic travel option in this location.
 8. I acknowledge that the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. However, this does not alter the fact that the most suitable and sustainable locations for homes are those that provide the necessary infrastructure and facilities, that limit the need to travel and that offer a genuine choice of transport modes.
 9. Means of disposing of foul water and a supply of water and electricity appear to be minimum requirements rather than matters that weigh in favour of the location. Future occupiers could have their shopping delivered and some may work from home. However, there is little to suggest that the proposal would be a car free development or that in reality future occupiers would choose to, or could, live here without access to private transport. The location does not minimise the need to travel and future occupiers would be heavily dependent on private car journeys.
 10. The Framework advises that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should also be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.
 11. In this case, the parish of Aikton comprises several villages including Bigglands, Wampool, Gamelsby and Wiggonby. These are all smaller settlements than Aikton and they are not identified as suitable locations for new housing. Except for the primary school in Wiggonby, I am not aware that there are shops or community facilities in the nearby villages. There is little evidence that the school would be at risk of closure without the proposal. Moreover, it has not been demonstrated how, in the apparent absence of facilities, new housing in the largest village in the parish would contribute to support for the vitality of rural communities in the surrounding smaller settlements.
 12. The Permission in Principle route aims to establish whether a site is suitable in principle for development. Therefore, issues of character and appearance are relevant insofar as they relate to the principle of development and its implications. In this case, the settlement pattern is formed by individual dwellings and building groups, including farmsteads, irregularly arranged and spaced to either side of the road. Built development is interrupted by undeveloped land. The intervening fields with their boundary hedgerows and trees contribute to the settlement pattern and they provide a visual connection to the surrounding countryside.

13. The proposal would result in the creation of a continuous ribbon of residential development. Irrespective of the design of the dwellings, the resulting urbanising effect of the proposal, and the loss of the field hedgerow and the visual connection to the countryside, would erode the rural settlement pattern. The proposal would not be sympathetic or well related to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. It would not establish or maintain a strong sense of place or make a positive contribution to local distinctiveness.
14. Therefore, the location is not suitable for new residential development, having regard to local and national planning policies. It would conflict with the spatial development strategy, sustainable development and design principles and rural housing aims of LP Policies S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5. In its decision notice, in relation to harm to visual amenity and village character, the Council refers to conflict with LP Policies S32 and DM7. Policy S32, among other things, requires that proposals avoid detrimental effects on local visual amenity and distinctive character. Taking into account the loss of hedgerow and erosion of the settlement pattern, I find the proposal would conflict with Policy S32. However, as Policy DM7 relates to town centre development, it is not relevant to the proposal and there would be no conflict with this policy.

Other Considerations

15. My attention has been drawn to a part of the Framework that encourages the use of previously developed land and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements where suitable opportunities exist. This appears to be a reference to paragraph 85, which recognises that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements. As the appeal site is not previously developed land and the proposal would not meet a local business or community need, paragraph 85 does not provide support for it.
16. Four dwellings would make a minimal contribution to the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes. There would be limited economic benefits in the short-term during construction. Future occupiers might have children that attend the parish primary school. Even so, in the absence of local shops or community facilities the proposal would make only a limited contribution to the rural economy or vitality of the rural community.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons set out above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan and there are no material considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, that would outweigh that conflict.
18. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR