



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 August 2022

by J Downs BA(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 November 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/D0515/W/22/3291336

Land adjacent to 80 Coates Road, Eastrea PE7 2BA

- 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 Ms T Hughes against the decision of Fenland District Council.
 - The application Ref F/YR21/0508/O, dated 28 March 2021, was refused by notice dated 31 August 2021.
 - The development is described as 'Proposed outline application for a max. 5no. dwellings'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application was made in outline with all matters reserved. A layout plan was submitted which is marked as indicative. I have dealt with the appeal on that basis.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - the effect on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - whether the site is a suitable location for housing.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site forms part of an agricultural field fronting onto Coates Road which abuts the built-up area of Eastrea on one side. There is development on the opposite side of Coates Road however a notable area of this is occupied by an Equestrian Centre which serves to reinforce the rural character of this area. The other dwellings are set in spacious plots. They are generally well screened by landscaping which reduces the perception of development between Eastrea and Coates. There is no development to the remaining two sides which would remain as an agricultural field. This field separates Eastrea from Coates.
5. Fenland Local Plan 2014 (FLP) Policy LP12 sets out expectations for the form that development in rural areas should take. It is clear that it seeks to avoid harm to the open character of the countryside, retain the individual identities of settlements and prevent further linear or ribbon development.

6. The predominant form of Eastrea is the clustered development around both sides of Wype Road, albeit there is a linear element to development along Coates Road/ Eastrea Road. Although the appeal is in outline, the location and size of the site is such that the proposed development would inevitably extend Eastrea in a linear manner into the undeveloped countryside.
7. The appeal site would reduce the open gap between Coates and Eastrea. While the majority of the gap would remain, the appeal proposal nonetheless would be a noticeable encroachment into the space between the settlements.
8. The proposed development would also result in the loss of a small area of agricultural land. While the wider agricultural character and appearance would remain due to the extent of the field, there would be a limited localised harm arising from the development.
9. An appeal decision¹ within the Council's area has been brought to my attention by the appellant. While I do not have the full details of that case before me, I note that Inspector considered that there was 'no obvious spatial separation' between the two settlements and the appeal site was 'viewed against a backdrop of existing houses'. In this case, the field that this appeal site forms part of represents a clear separation between the two settlements. It is viewed in either the context of the surrounding agricultural landscape, or the adjacent buildings that have the appearance of traditional agricultural buildings. These factors serve to distinguish the two appeals, each of which must be considered on their own merits.
10. The proposal would extend the existing linear features of Eastrea and would not be in keeping with its core shape and form. There would be harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding farmland, albeit this would be limited. While it would not cause coalescence between the villages, it would nonetheless reduce the separation between Coates and Eastrea. In relation to this main issue, I therefore find that the proposed development would have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and would not be in accordance with FLP Policy LP12 which seeks to retain the wide open character of the countryside.

Suitability of the location

11. Eastrea is identified as a small village in FLP Policy LP3 which establishes the spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy. This sets out that development in small villages will be considered on its merits however it is expected to be of a very limited nature and limited in scale to residential infilling. FLP Policy LP12 expands on this further, confirming that only infill sites will normally be considered favourably.
12. The separation of this site by Coates Road from the development opposite is sufficient to sever it in such a way that this site would not reasonably be viewed as an infill site as it is not between structures. Given that I have identified that harm would arise to the character and appearance of the area, there is no substantive evidence before me to demonstrate why an alternative form would be acceptable in this case.
13. The lack of structures to two sides of the appeal site means there is no context against which to assess whether the scale of the development is appropriate.

¹ APP/D0515/W/19/3230692 allowed 16 October 2019

However, even if I were to conclude that five dwellings was an appropriate scale of development, this would not overcome the fact that the development would not be infill as sought by the development plan for small villages.

14. In relation to this main issue, I conclude that the appeal site would not be a suitable location for housing as it would not be infill development as sought by FLP Policies LP3 and LP12.

Other Matters

15. The Council's report referred to the Whittlesey Draft Neighbourhood Plan (NP). While the Council identified policies which the proposed development would be contrary to, little weight was attached given the stage of plan preparation at that time. While the NP has since been submitted for examination, it is not yet made. I therefore attach limited weight to it.
16. I acknowledge that there would be benefits from the provision of an additional five dwellings in terms of the contribution to the supply of housing. However this benefit would be of limited weight given the small contribution it would make.
17. The appellant has highlighted the public support for the appeal proposal and that no concerns have been raised with regard to highway safety or flood risk, noting this is a particular concern within the authority area. However, these technical issues equate to a lack of harm and are therefore neutral in the determination of the appeal.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons given above, the appeal proposal would conflict with the development plan. There are no material considerations of sufficient weight to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise. Therefore the appeal is dismissed.

J Downs

INSPECTOR