



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 October 2022

by A Hunter LLB (Hons) PG Dip MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 November 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/V2635/W/22/3295193

**Former College of West Anglia, Meadowgate Equestrian Centre,
Meadowgate Lane, Wisbech PE13 2JH**

- 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 P Humphrey against the decision of King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/01688/F, dated 22 September 2020, was refused by notice dated 25 November 2021.
 - The development proposed is change of use and conversion of former teaching block to 5no dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are whether the buildings and location of the appeal site are suitable for new dwellings.

Reasons

3. Policies CS01 and CS02 of the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Local Development Framework Core Strategy, adopted July 2011 (CS) set the overarching approach to the location of new residential development in the Borough. These policies seek to direct new development to the most sustainable and accessible locations whilst preventing encroachment into the countryside.
4. The buildings the subject of this appeal are located outside of settlement development limits, identified within the Council's Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan, adopted September 2016 (SADM) and are located within the countryside for planning policy purposes.
5. New development in the countryside is restricted to the exceptions permitted by Policy DM2 of the SADM and Policy CS06 of the CS. Policy DM2 lists a number of exceptions for residential development in the countryside, none of which apply to this scheme. Policy CS06 of the CS, supports the conversion of buildings in the countryside to a residential use providing that 4 criteria are complied with, which are considered below.
6. The prevailing countryside landscape is relatively flat and contains groups of trees and sporadic buildings. The equestrian buildings in question are set back from Meadowgate Lane, providing a rural context to the site. This relative openness and separation from Meadowgate Lane, is quite distinct from the

housing that lines other parts of Meadowgate Lane that are within the settlement's development limit.

7. The buildings on the appeal site form part of a complex of buildings at this former equestrian college. The main building is rectangular in shape, features a pitched roof with walls of brick and timber cladding under an asbestos sheeted roof. The other building has a shallower gable and is of modern timber construction and used as stables. Both buildings have their gables broadly facing Meadowgate Lane but are located away from the roadside.
8. From my site inspection, it was clear that the utilitarian appearance of the buildings in question do not make a positive contribution to the landscape, either singularly or as a group. The main building appears redundant and not in a good condition, with some openings boarded. The stables feature horizontal timber boarding and appear as an anomaly due to their limited scale and external appearance. The wording of Policy CS06, is aimed at preventing the conversion of buildings such as this for residential use, limiting this exceptional policy to only those buildings that positively contribute to the landscape.
9. In terms of settlement pattern and location requirements of CS Policy CS06, the evidence before me and from my observations indicates that the appeal site is located close to existing and future development at Wisbech including the services and facilities therein. These uses, housing and employment would be easily accessible from the new dwellings. Moreover, the limited scale of the development would be commensurate to the site's relationship to the settlement pattern nearby. Accordingly, in respect of these matters there would be no conflict with CS Policy CS06.
10. I note that there is dispute over whether residential use is the only viable option for the buildings. Whilst there is limited evidence to substantiate this, even if it were, CS Policy CS06 is clear that in terms of conversion to residential use, each of the criteria set out within the policy needs to be complied with, not just one or two factors.
11. Therefore, whilst the proposal would comply with the settlement pattern and location criteria necessary for conversions of buildings to residential use as set out in CS Policy CS06, and even if I were to find that other uses for the buildings would not be viable, it is clear that the condition and design of the buildings not making a positive contribution to the landscape mean that the proposal must fail.
12. In view of the above, I conclude that the buildings are not appropriate for conversion to residential use, because of the conflict with Policies DM2, CS06 and CS08 of the CS, which amongst other things, seek to restrict development in the countryside unless certain criteria are complied with and requires development to enhance the quality of the area.

Other Matters

13. Whether it is more sustainable to convert buildings than undertake a newbuild is not a consideration for this appeal. The strategic approach to the location of new housing sites in the development plan, is to direct residential development away from countryside locations, such as this. It is only the very limited exception in Policy CS06 that allows the conversion of existing buildings to a residential use, when all relevant requirements are met.

14. In terms of the evidence before me, I find the proposal could use sustainable design features, to comply with the relevant part of CS Policy CS08. Although, I note the scope of Policy CS08 is much wider, and its objectives also require development to enhance the quality of the area. Whilst the proposal could meet part of Policy CS08 relating to sustainable design features, and paragraph 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework), both the development plan and the Framework need to be read as a whole.
15. The appellant has argued that the site should not be treated as being in the countryside given its relative accessibility and close proximity to Wisebech's development limit. The appellant's arguments are noted, but they do not outweigh the weight of the adopted policies or settlement limits of the development plan.
16. The appellant's statement has referred to information submitted regarding the building's structural condition, the suitability and the design of the proposed conversion, and its location within Flood Zone 1. I note these comments and the contents of this information, however these are neutral factors in the overall planning balance.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons outlined above, the proposed development conflicts with the development plan taken as whole. There are no other considerations which indicate a decision other than in accordance with the development plan. I therefore dismiss the appeal.

A Hunter

INSPECTOR