



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 December 2022

by Nichola Robinson BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 December 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/22/3300589

Enterprise Nurseries, Ely Road, Landbeach, Cambridgeshire CB25 9NN

- 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 Crickmore against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 22/00484/FUL, dated 3 February 2022, was refused by notice dated 28 March 2022.
 - The development proposed is a single bungalow dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - Whether or not the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
 - The effect on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - Whether the proposal is in a suitable location for housing, with regard to the spatial strategy of the development plan and accessibility;
 - The effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - If the proposal is inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

3. The appeal site comprises a vacant parcel of land which is situated in the Green Belt. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are openness and permanence. It goes on to state that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
4. Development within the Green Belt is inappropriate with the exception of the types of development listed in paragraphs 149 and 150 of the Framework. The

appellant states that the proposal meets one such exception set out in criteria e of paragraph 149 of the Framework, which allows limited infilling in villages.

5. The appeal site is located within a small cluster of dwellings and other buildings. These buildings are physically and spatially separated from the nearest settlements of Landbeach and Waterbeach and are not recognised as forming part of a development framework in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) (LP). Thus, this cluster of buildings does not comprise a village, and the proposal is not therefore limited infilling in a village. Thus, the proposal would comprise inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Effect on the openness of the Green Belt

6. The Framework (paragraph 133) indicates that openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt. The construction of a dwelling on the site would result in built development where currently there is none.
7. The site is bordered by temporary and permanent built form on all sides and the proposed dwelling would be located within the centre of this built form. The site is partially screened by vegetation to the north and west and there are limited views of the site from the A10. Nonetheless, the proposed dwelling and associated parking and turning areas would be considerable in scale and would be clearly visible on the site. Furthermore, the roof of the dwelling would be visible above the boundary treatment and between gaps in vegetation from neighbouring sites and the access track.
8. On this basis, the proposed dwelling would not comprise a minor intensification of built form and would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt. It would also conflict with those aims of LP Policies NH/8 and NH/9 which state that development in the Green Belt must be located and designed so that it does not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt, and which allow for limited infilling of small gaps between existing built development where it has no greater impact upon the openness of the Green Belt.

Suitability of location for housing

9. LP Policy S/7 states that outside development frameworks only allocations within Neighbourhood Plans that have come into force and development for agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation and other uses which need to be located in the countryside or where supported by other policies in the development plan will be permitted. The supporting text to this policy sets out that this is necessary to protect the countryside from encroachment and to help guard against incremental growth in unsustainable locations.
10. The appeal site is located outside of a development framework and is not covered by an allocation in a neighbourhood plan. The proposal would not meet any of the exceptions listed in LP Policy S/7, the supporting text to which states that frameworks have not been defined around small clusters of houses to limit the amount of new development that can take place in rural areas with few services and little or no public transport.
11. The surrounding area does not contain any community facilities. Thus, future occupiers of the dwelling are likely to travel to settlements further afield, such

as Waterbeach, Milton and Cambridge¹ for services necessary for day-to-day living. The Framework indicates that some travel by private vehicle is likely in rural areas such as this. Whilst it is stated that the nearest settlements of Waterbeach and Milton are 'Minor Rural Centres' which offer a good range of local facilities, access to these settlements is along a busy unlit road and there is no crossing facility from the appeal site to the footpath/cycleway. At my mid-morning site visit I observed that traffic volumes on this road were high, and it was difficult to cross on foot. Whilst this is a snapshot in time, there is nevertheless nothing in the evidence before me which indicates that these observations are atypical of the area. Given the level of local service provision, and the condition of the local pedestrian and cycle network, journeys on foot or by bike may be undesirable and there would be a high probability that residents of the new dwelling would drive into neighbouring towns and villages, rather than walk or cycle as a result of these conditions. Similarly, I have been presented with no compelling evidence that future occupiers would walk or cycle to Waterbeach railway station, given the condition of the local pedestrian and cycle network and distance from the appeal site².

12. The appellant states that the site is served by a bus service which runs between Waterbeach, Addenbrookes Hospital and Cambridge City centre. However, I have no evidence of the frequency of these services and whether there would be a reasonable prospect of future occupiers of the dwelling using public transport from this location.
13. Therefore, the proposal would introduce a dwelling in the open countryside in an area which is poorly served by local services contrary to the Council's strategic objectives for the location of development. This would conflict with the objectives of LP Policy S/7 which seek, amongst other matters, to ensure that the countryside is protected from gradual encroachment and growth is directed away from unsustainable locations. There would also be conflict with the core planning principles of the Framework which seek to guide development towards sustainable solutions.

Character and appearance

14. The appeal site is located within a small cluster of buildings which span both sides of the A10. The appeal site is accessed from a track off the A10 from which other dwellings are accessed. Dwellings within the surrounding area are varied in character and materials comprising a mixture of single and two storey dwellings set within spacious plots, many of which have pitched roofs. Dwellings which front the A10 are set back from the road and screened by vegetation. The dwellings which are accessed from the track are set within well-contained plots which are screened by vegetation and boundary treatment. To the south the site Grasshopper Park contains a number of single and two storey temporary and permanent commercial buildings. The surrounding area is varied and rural in character.
15. The proposal involves the erection of a large bungalow set within a spacious plot. This bungalow would comprise 3 interlocking gables. The application form states that the dwelling would be finished with brick with a concrete tile roof and the submission references the use of standing seam zinc cladding. The pitched roof and proposed palette of materials would be consistent with the

¹ Located over 1 mile from the appeal site

² Located 1.5 miles from the appeal site

architectural style of dwellings in the surrounding area and the dwelling and plot size would be consistent with dwellings in the surrounding area.

16. On this basis the proposal would not be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. Therefore, it would accord with those aims of LP Policy HQ/1 which set out that all new development must be of high quality design which, amongst other matters, is compatible with its location and appropriate in terms of scale, density, mass, form, siting, design, proportion, materials, texture and colour in relation to the surrounding area.

Other considerations

17. I accept that the construction of one dwelling would make a small contribution towards local housing supply and there would be short-term economic benefits associated with construction of the dwelling, as well as long term benefits for the local economy and support for local services in increased consumer spending.
18. The proposal would provide a thermally efficient home for which 10% of the energy needs would be met by an Air Source Heat Pump. It would also include the provision of an electric car charging point. These matters would help to support more sustainable living and weigh in favour of the proposal. However, given the scale of the development, such benefit has limited weight.
19. The submission states that the proposal would result in an enhancement of biodiversity. However, the proposal is not supported by any detail setting out how this would be achieved to give any substantial credence to.
20. I note that the main parties agree that the proposal would not result in adverse impacts in relation to highway safety, ecology, flood risk, or contamination. However, the absence of harm in these regards does not weigh in favour of the proposal, as it would be required in any event. Therefore, these matters are neutral in the overall planning balance.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

21. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. In addition, there are adverse impacts arising from the site's location in relation to local services. Substantial weight should be given to the harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other considerations.
22. Given the substantial weight to be given to Green Belt harm combined with the other identified harm, relative to the limited benefits of the proposed scheme, the harm is not clearly outweighed by the other considerations. Therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist. Consequently, for the reasons given above, the appeal does not succeed.

Nichola Robinson

INSPECTOR