

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 December 2022

by R C Shrimplin MA(Cantab) DipArch RIBA FRTPI FCI Arb MCIL

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 January 2023

Appeal Reference: APP/W3520/W/22/3296897

Land South of Fieldwood House, Haughley Green, Haughley IP14 3RQ

- 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 S Beahan against the decision of Mid Suffolk District Council.
 - The application (reference DC/21/05494, dated 3 October 2021) was refused by notice dated 15 December 2021.
 - The development proposed is described in the application form as: "Erection of up to four dwellings and new vehicular access".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary points

2. The application is made in outline, with all matters reserved, other than access.

Main issues

3. The main issue to be determined in this appeal is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surroundings, including the setting of the nearby listed building. In addition, it is necessary to consider the sustainability of the proposed development.

Reasons

4. Haughley is significant village, north-west of Stowmarket and close to the A14 trunk road. Haughley Green is a smaller settlement to the north of Haughley and both are located in a predominantly rural area, dominated by agriculture but with scattered buildings and some smaller building groups.
5. Haughley Green itself is somewhat dispersed in character, ranged along the road through the village which runs north from Haughley. There are two larger agglomerations of houses, mainly concentrated on the western side of the road, with other buildings more loosely spread out. These include a large house on the eastern side of the road, 'Walnut Tree Manor', a former farmhouse that dates from the late seventeenth century, with an earlier core and later remodelling. It is listed (Grade II) as a building of special architectural or historic interest.

6. The appeal site is located on the west of the road through the village, opposite 'Walnut Tree Manor'. At this point, there is a large open field, laid to grass and apparently used for grazing livestock, although it was empty of animals at the time of the site visit. The appeal site itself forms part of this large field, taking up the north-eastern corner of the field, although the boundaries of the appeal site are not currently defined on the land. The field is bounded by hedges, including a mature hedge on the roadside and the side and rear hedges also have some mature trees set within them.
7. It is proposed to create a new highway access in the centre of the area identified as the appeal site and to erect up to four dwellings on the plot.
8. The 'National Planning Policy Framework' emphasises the aim of promoting sustainable development and it acknowledges the importance of the natural and local environment, recognising "the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside", among other things. It also has the more general aim of "achieving well designed places" in the broadest sense (notably at Section 12), while making effective use of land and encouraging economic activity.
9. The 'National Planning Policy Framework' also emphasises the importance of conserving and enhancing the historic environment (especially at Section 16), underpinning provisions in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 that impose obligations on those considering whether to grant planning permission for development that would affect the setting of a listed building. In such cases, it is necessary to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting.
10. Policies in the Development Plan have the same aims. In particular, Policy CS5 of the 'Core Strategy' (which was adopted in 2008) is a wide- ranging policy that seeks to promote good design, protecting the local character of the countryside, generally, and the historic environment, specifically, among other things. 'Haughley Neighbourhood Plan' (which was adopted in 2019) does not allow for development on land that is outside the settlement boundary. Other Policies in the Development Plan promote sustainable development, focussing new development on larger settlements that offer a range of facilities and services.
11. The appeal site takes up part of an open area of land between two more closely built up parts of the settlement. The undeveloped frontage is extensive, however, and the new houses would occupy only a part of the larger field. Thus, the proposed development would not infill a modest gap nor round off the settlement but would add to sporadic development on or near the road frontage, undermining the rural nature of the surroundings. The frontage would no longer have a rural appearance and the character of the countryside in this locality would be significantly changed. The scheme would be very unsympathetic to the existing local character and landscape setting.
12. The listed building opposite the appeal site is well set back from the road and is screened to an extent by a number of trees. Although the proposed new development would have some impact on the openness of the setting of the listed building, the impact on the character and appearance of the countryside more generally would be more critical, in my view.

13. The proposed new development would add to the supply of houses in the District but the Council have demonstrated an adequate supply of housing land, in accordance with planning policies, and the pressure for additional housing land is limited, therefore. Moreover, the development would be poorly located in relation to services and facilities. The new houses would not be well related to an existing substantial settlement and would, therefore, be contrary to both national and local policies that are intended to promote sustainable development.
14. In short, I am convinced that the harm that would be done to the character and appearance of the surroundings outweighs the benefits of the project. Hence, I have concluded that the scheme before me would conflict with both national and local planning policies (including the Development Plan) and that it ought not to be allowed. Although only a small number of houses are proposed in this case, such a project could be too often repeated, which would undermine planning policies even more obviously.
15. I have considered all the matters that have been raised in the representations, including references to other sites in the area, but I have found nothing to cause me to alter my decision.

Roger C. Shrimplin

INSPECTOR