
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 November 2022

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 January 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/W/22/3304074

Daniels Farm, Preston Road, Longridge, Lancashire, PR3 3BL

- 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 Mr Neil Forshaw against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 3/2021/1246, dated 2 December 2021, was refused by notice dated 17 March 2022.
 - The development proposed is outline planning application for the erection of 2no. self-build dwellings following demolition of existing agricultural buildings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The planning application was submitted in outline with matters except for access reserved for future consideration. Accordingly, I have taken account of the illustrative plan only insofar as it demonstrates how 2 dwellings with associated parking, access and private outdoor space could be accommodated.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the location is suitable for new residential development, having regard to local and national policy for the provision of housing.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises a small group of modern agricultural buildings with associated hardstanding. These form a cluster of built development together with Alston Fold Farm to the west and dwellings and buildings to the south east. Access is from Preston Road via a long track across open land that also serves as a public right of way. The group is in the open countryside and it is well separated from built development in the surrounding area, including along Preston Road and in the settlement of Longridge.
5. The Council's spatial development strategy is set out in the Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy 2008-2028 Adopted December 2014 (the CS). This seeks to focus new housing in accordance with the hierarchy of sustainable settlements. CS Policy DMG2 requires development outside of the defined settlements to meet criteria including relating to the local economy, for the purposes of forestry or agriculture, or for local needs housing that meets an identified need. CS Policy DMH3 limits development in the open countryside

subject to exceptions including residential development which meets an identified local need.

6. The proposal would be self-build dwellings, which the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) refers to as housing built by an individual or group of persons or persons working with or for them to be occupied by that individual. While the dwellings could be built by local persons, there is little substantive evidence that would be the case here. Self-build housing is not in any case local needs housing for the purposes of the CS. The proposal would not meet the exceptions to development in the open countryside.
7. Although the appeal site is not in or immediately adjacent to a settlement, it is not remote from dwellings and buildings. The proposal would also be within several hundred metres walking distance of Preston Road where there are further dwellings, a public house and a restaurant. However, the primary school is further than a short or convenient walk, being on the opposite side of the busy Preston Road and without any apparent safe opportunities for children to cross. Grimsargh and Longridge, which offer a range of shops and services, while connected by a footway, are even further from the appeal site.
8. Preston Road does not appear overly conducive to cycling, but nonetheless the proposal would be within cycling distance of settlements and there are bus stops within walking distance that offer regular services to Longridge and Preston via Grimsargh. Therefore, there would be opportunities for future occupiers to make some journeys by more sustainable transport modes. Even so, taking into account the limited local shops and services and the realities of living in the countryside, there would be a likely heavy reliance on, and a consequent increase in, private vehicle journeys from this location.
9. Therefore, notwithstanding that there will be fewer opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions in rural areas and taking into account the accessibility of services and facilities, I conclude that the proposal would conflict with the housing aims of CS Policies DMG2 and DMH3 insofar as it would be residential development outside of a sustainable settlement and not of a type supported in the open countryside.

Other Considerations and Planning Balance

10. There is permission for the change of use of one agricultural building to one dwelling under class Q (ref 3/2021/0194). If the appeal should fail, this would be a realistic fallback position at this site. Although acknowledging that it would conflict with policy DMH3, the appellant considers the proposal would result in greater visual enhancement of the site to the benefit of nearby dwellings.
11. Irrespective of the intention to deliver houses in keeping with the character of the area, appearance and landscaping would be reserved matters and they are not before me. I have however had regard to the landscape and visual assessment (the LVA). This notes that the agricultural appeal buildings are part of an established traditional farmstead in open farmland, substantially enclosed by mature vegetation and buildings. The LVA concludes that residential development would have a minor beneficial visual effect on neighbouring residential occupiers, a moderate/minor adverse visual effect on users of the footpath and minor adverse/ neutral effects on other local visual receptors. There is little evidence that the proposal would result in significantly greater visual benefits than the fallback. The fallback may establish the principle of

residential use, but the acceptable reuse of a rural building does not provide a justification for the construction of a greater number of new dwellings.

12. There is nearby planning permission (refs 3/2018/0105 and 3/2016/0974) for 256 dwellings, a local neighbourhood centre, access arrangements and associated landscaping/ wildlife infrastructure at the edge of Longridge. The plans illustrate that the proposal would be widely separated from the residential developed areas of that scheme by a generous swathe of green infrastructure. The proposal would not be physically, visually or functionally related to the new housing or the green infrastructure. There is little evidence that the green infrastructure would have an urbanising effect on the countryside and it would not integrate the proposal into the settlement. Development elsewhere does not provide a justification for the proposal.
13. The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (as amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016) requires local planning authorities to keep a register of persons seeking to acquire a serviced plot of land for self-build or custom-build housing. It also requires the relevant authority to give suitable development permission to enough serviced plots of land to meet the identified demand.
14. In a recent appeal (ref APP/T2350/W/19/3236414) in Whalley, the Council was unable to demonstrate it could meet the demand on the register. Taking into account the prospect of self-build housing delivery in the borough and the absence of explicit self-building housing policies, the Inspector questioned whether there were sufficient relevant Local Plan policies to deliver the Framework's housing aims and engaged the 'tilted balance' in paragraph 11 of the Framework. However, while acknowledging the statutory duty to provide self-build plots, the Inspector nevertheless afforded it limited weight because there was no mechanism to secure the 4 plots in that case for that purpose.
15. At the time this appeal was made, there were around 15 individuals/groups on the register. It remains the case that the Council is apparently unable to demonstrate it can meet the demand on the self-build register and there are no specific policies for self-build housing in the development plan. Therefore, Framework paragraph 11 may be similarly engaged.
16. Paragraph 11d) ii. of the Framework states that where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important are out-of-date, permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.
17. The Framework supports the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, with reference to the needs of groups with specific housing requirements. Two dwellings would make a negligible contribution to the supply of housing and a small contribution towards meeting the demand for self-build housing. However, on the basis of the evidence, I am not satisfied that matters relating to self-build could be satisfactorily secured through planning conditions and there appears to be no robust mechanism such as a legal agreement to ensure that the proposal would be self-build or custom-build housing. Therefore, and taking into account the scale of the proposal, the contribution to self-build housing carries limited positive weight.

18. The Framework promotes rural housing development that reflects local need including affordable housing to meet identified local needs, and housing located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. The proposal would not be affordable housing and it would not demonstrably meet an identified local need. There would be limited economic benefits during construction and occupation of 2 dwellings. Taking into account its location and surrounding context, the proposal would make little contribution to the vitality of a rural community. These matters carry little weight in favour.
19. The location would be relatively accessible by sustainable transport modes, but the proposal would not minimise the need to travel nor contribute to the aims of the Framework in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation including radical reductions in greenhouse gas emission or the reuse of existing resources such as the conversion of existing buildings. The location does not weigh in favour of the proposal. While the proposal could incorporate high quality design and landscaping, the theoretical design of future dwellings does not weigh in favour of the scheme. Absence of impacts in other regards, such as highways or the public right of way, similarly carry neutral weight.

Conclusion

20. I have concluded that the proposal would conflict with the Council's housing strategy and aims outside of the settlements and in the countryside. This is a matter that attracts significant weight. Conversely, the contribution to the supply of housing including self-build housing and the other considerations collectively carry only limited weight in favour of the proposal.
21. Applying Paragraph 11d) ii. of the Framework, the adverse impacts of granting planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would conflict with the development plan and there are no material considerations that would outweigh that conflict.
22. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR