



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 May 2023

by K Allen MEng (Hons) MArch PGCert ARB

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 August 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/W2845/W/22/3313056

18 High Street, Moulton NN3 7SR

- 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 Clayson Country Homes against the decision of West Northamptonshire Council.
- The application Ref WND/2021/0534, dated 20 August 2021, was refused by notice dated 4 August 2022.
- The development proposed is the removal of an attached garage at 18 High Street, demolition of barns and erection of 3no. dwellings. Existing perimeter wall made good and repointed.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. During the determination of the application the proposal was amended. The Council has confirmed that the proposal was determined based on the amended drawings. Consequently, the description of the development was amended and agreed by both parties. I have determined the appeal on the basis of the amended description as in the banner heading above and the following drawings:

• MOU 001	Rev G	Site Proposals Site Plan Context
• MOU 002	Rev D	Elevations (Front)
• MOU 002(2)	Rev B	Side Elevations & Sections
• MOU 003	Rev D	Floor Plans
• MOU 004	Rev B	Site Location Plan
• MOU 005	Rev F	Site Proposals Site Plan Walls & Trees
• MOU 006	Rev G	Site Proposals Site Plan Detail
• MOU 007	Rev B	Site Sections and Context
• MOU18 001	Rev B	Proposed Elevations
• MOU18 002	Rev B	Proposed Plans

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Moulton Conservation Area; and
 - whether, having regard to local policy, the appeal site is a suitable location for the development.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site is located in the historic centre of the village which has a mix of residential, commercial and community facilities. The High Street has a distinct sense of enclosure along its length which is intermittently broken by glimpsed views of open countryside to the south. The appeal site comprises a detached 1960's house set near the highway which in design terms is not in keeping with the surrounding period properties. The remainder of the site to the south is visible within a glimpsed view between Nos 16 and 18 and comprises several dilapidated barns set to the rear of the neighbouring properties.
5. The site boundaries are clearly defined on all sides by a combination of dry-stone walling and post and rail fencing. Portions of the dry-stone wall, identified as having historic interest, are in disrepair. Despite the close proximity of surrounding properties and the existing barn structures, the appeal site is distinctly open, with unrestricted views across the site towards open countryside. The appeal site is within the Moulton Conservation Area (MCA) and partially within the defined settlement boundary and Green Wedge. Although outside of the appeal site boundary, Lantsbury's Field to the south, is visible across the appeal site and is identified as a Local Green Space in the made Moulton Neighbourhood Development Plan 2014-2029 (December 2016) (MNP).
6. The MCA comprises a diverse range of buildings of varying design and age that has been shaped by its topography. It derives significance from the quality and mix of its built heritage assets, tight grain form, sense of enclosure and glimpsed countryside views. There is a visual unity in the immediate locality that results from consistency in scale and the use of local materials and detailing. The existing dwelling at No 18 does not contribute positively to the MCA. However, the proximity of the barns to the High Street and the views through the site to open countryside beyond contribute significantly to the rural agricultural character of this part of the village.
7. Although, the proposal would widen the access between Nos 16 and 18 High Street, opening up views of the site and the open countryside beyond, it would erode the sense of enclosure found along the High Street. The proposal would utilise local vernacular design, which would be in keeping with the surrounding properties. It would not compromise the objective of the Green Wedge to maintain physical and visual separation between settlements. However, the development of the site with a residential terrace would urbanise the plot.
8. The proposal would remove the dilapidated barns which do not positively contribute to the area and would reflect the existing linear form on site. Nevertheless, the proposal would be set substantially forward of the existing building line. While the area of hardstanding would be less than that proposed previously it would still cover a significant proportion of the site. The proposed retaining walls would help to obscure cars, however given the height of modern cars and the widened access, domestic features would be readily visible across the site.
9. When viewed in combination, the gable end of the proposal, the large areas of hardstanding and the visible domestic features, including cars and bins, would be dominant features. The proposal would not harm the function, openness, or

permanence of Lantsbury's Field. However, it would significantly diminish the contribution that the site makes to the setting of the High Street, ultimately harming the glimpsed countryside views which contribute to the rural agricultural character of this part of the village. Consequently, the proposal would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the MCA and would cause, in the words of the Framework, less than substantial harm to its significance.

10. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposal would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the MCA in conflict with Policy R1, parts B and C of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan Part 1 (December 2014) (LPP1), Policy ENV7 of the Settlements and Countryside Local Plan Part 2 For Daventry District 2011-2029 (February 2020) (LLP2), Policy H1, parts b, c and d of the MNP, and with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). These collectively seek to ensure that development is sympathetic to local character and history, sustains or enhances conservation areas and does not affect open land which is of significance to the character of an area.

Location

11. Policies S1 and R1 of the LPP1 outline the spatial strategy for the distribution of housing development within the district, with development focused on urban areas. These policies, however, do support rural residential development within the existing confines of a village where, amongst other things, development would preserve significant open land and heritage assets. Development outside of the confines of villages is limited to the re-use of existing buildings or where development would enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.
12. The Council has confirmed that the rural housing requirement has been met which engages further controls, stipulating dwellings, both inside and outside of existing village confines should only be permitted where there would be environmental improvements to a site or where the development would support essential local services.
13. The appeal site is partially within the defined settlement boundary of Moulton. I acknowledge the accessibility of the site, its proximity to local services and that the proposal would respect the quality of tranquillity. However, as described above, the proposal would have a detrimental effect on open land which is of particular significance to the character of the village and the MCA. Further, the barns are derelict agricultural buildings and are not, in accordance with the Framework definition regarded as previously developed land, a fact uncontested by the appellant.
14. The appellant contends that the repair of the dry-stone wall and the enhancements to No 18 would enhance the vitality of the community. However, the economic benefit of local jobs would be short lived, and the visual improvements would not contribute to the ongoing vitality of the community. The proposal would contribute three additional dwellings to the local housing supply which would help to support local services, but there is no indication that local services are under threat.
15. Policy RA1 of the LPP2 defines Moulton as a Primary Service Village. Part A supports development within the confines of the village while Part B indicates the circumstances where development outside of the defined settlement

boundary would be acceptable. As acknowledged by the appellant, the proposal would not comply with any of these exceptions. Part C further supports the criteria outlined within Policies S1 and R1 of the LPP1 as discussed above. Part D refers to neighbourhood plan allocations, however the appeal site has not been allocated by the MDP.

16. Policy RA6 of the LPP2 seeks to ensure that the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside is maintained. It provides limited support for specific development outside of the confines of villages, however none of these are relevant in this case. Whilst I acknowledge the poor condition of the existing barns, their presence is not a reason, on its own, to allow unacceptable developments. Further, I am not satisfied that the proposal would be the only way to improve the visual condition of the site.
17. Policy H1 of the MNP reiterates Policies S1, R1 and RA1, limiting small residential development to infill and redevelopment sites within the village. Detailed criteria are provided which are consistent with the policies discussed above, with no further criteria to justify the proposal.
18. Consequently, having regard to local policy, the appeal site is not a suitable location for the development. The proposal would conflict with Policies S1 and R1 of the LPP1, Policies RA1 and RA6 of the LPP2 and Policy H1 of the MNP which collectively outline the spatial strategy for the area by identifying where growth and development should be focussed and ensuring development does not affect open land which is significant to the character of a village and preserves and enhances areas of historic importance.

Conclusion

19. The starting point for any planning decision is Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 which requires decisions to be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. I have a statutory duty under Section 72 to give special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the MCA. The Framework specifies that development proposals which cause less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, in this case the MCA, should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
20. The appeal proposal is in an accessible location, close to facilities and services. The residential provision would also bring economic and social benefits and add three units to the local housing supply which would contribute to unmet housing need in the area. It would improve the appearance and energy efficiency of No 18 High Street. The proposed alterations would be in keeping with the surrounding properties, in terms of form, materials and detailing. In addition, the proposal would not affect nearby protected trees and would repair, preserve, and secure the historic value of the dry-stone walls surrounding the site and Lantsbury's Field.
21. Whilst the Framework seeks to boost the supply of housing, the social and economic benefits of the proposal, including local jobs, would be limited by the scale of the development. I acknowledge the significant cost associated with the dry-stone wall repairs and improvements to No 18. However, I have no evidence before me to suggest that the proposal would be the only way to secure these works. Although these benefits weigh in favour of the scheme, in my view, they are significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the harm the

development would cause to the MCA a matter to which I am required to give great weight. The benefits outlined when taken either individually or cumulatively do not justify a decision other than in accordance with the development plan.

22. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no material considerations, including the Framework that would outweigh that conflict. Therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

K Allen

INSPECTOR