



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 September 2023

by Nick Palmer BA (Hons) BPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 September 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/X3540/W/22/3309813

Bell View Farm, Manse Lane, Cratfield, Suffolk IP19 0DJ

- 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 and Mrs Sannick against the decision of East Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref DC/22/0855/OUT, dated 3 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 20 May 2022.
 - The development proposed is erection of a detached dwelling utilising the existing access to Bell View Farm.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application is for outline planning permission with details of the means of access submitted for approval. An indicative site plan has been submitted and I shall consider that plan on this basis.
3. The appellant has submitted a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal with the appeal, which addresses the Council's second reason for refusal. Accordingly, I shall not consider this as a main issue.

Main Issues

4. The main issues in the appeal are:
 - i) the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area, including its effect on heritage assets; and
 - ii) its accessibility to services and facilities by sustainable means.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. The settlement of Cratfield is a small hamlet. Historically it included a village green on both sides of Bell Green. This was enclosed following the Enclosure Act of 1849. Development has subsequently taken place along the road within the area of the former green but to a limited extent. The area around the junction of Bell Green and Manse Lane remains open and the site occupies part of this open area. It forms part of the curtilage of Bell View Farm and appeared on my visit to be part of the garden to that property, although I note that interested parties have referred to it as a meadow. On the opposite side

- of Bell Green there is a graveyard and open land in front of Bell Farm. To the south-east of the road junction there is garden land to Bell Green Cottage.
6. The site is in the countryside for planning policy purposes. Policy SCLP5.3 of the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (2020) (LP) limits residential development outside of the settlement boundaries which are defined on the adopted Policies Map. This policy allows for limited development within existing clusters. Policy SCLP5.4 of the LP sets out requirements for such development. A 'cluster' is defined in the policy as a continuous line of existing dwellings or a close group of existing dwellings adjacent to an existing highway and which contains 5 or more dwellings. The Council's Supplementary Planning Document¹ provides guidance on this policy.
 7. There are continuous lines of development on Bell Green on both sides of the junction, but these are separated by the open area around the junction. The dwellings off Manse Lane are informally sited and set back from the road by varying distances. The degree of separation between the dwellings to the north and south of Manse Lane is such that those dwellings do not form a close group.
 8. In my view the two dwellings to the immediate north of the site² are part of a continuous line of development rather than part of a group in conjunction with Bell View Farm, The Manse and Salisbury House. For this reason and those given above I do not consider the site to be within a cluster as defined in the policy.
 9. However, if the site were to be considered as part of a cluster for the purposes of Policy SCLP5.4, criterion (d) requires that the development would not cause undue harm to the character and appearance of the cluster or result in any harmful visual intrusion into the surrounding landscape.
 10. Details of layout or scale have not been submitted. The existing hedges along the road boundaries would permit views of the dwelling. The development to the north of the site extends towards Bell Green, but the site clearly forms a key part of the open area adjacent to the road junction. The development would be intrusive in this context. The hedges could be increased in height or additional planting provided which could provide some visual screening. Nonetheless it is likely that the dwelling would be visible at least along the access drive from Manse Lane.
 11. The dwelling would intrude into the open space that was historically part of the village green. This is an important local landscape feature and is recorded in the Suffolk Historic Environment Record.³
 12. The appellant has suggested setting the dwelling back behind a line drawn from Meadowside House to Bell Green Cottage. This may limit visual intrusion across the corner, but it would not overcome the intrusion of the development into the historic landscape feature. For these reasons, the proposal would not accord with Policy SCLP5.4(d) of the LP.

¹ Housing in Clusters and Small Scale Residential Development in the Countryside Supplementary Planning Document (2022)

² Meadowside House and Wivern House

³ <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/Monument/MSF6794> (Ref. CRT 015)

13. It would also conflict with policies SCLP3.3 and SCLP5.3 of the LP which both resist residential development in the countryside.
14. Policy SCLP5.7 allows for residential development within existing gardens where there would be no harm to the character of the area. For the reasons given, the proposal would not accord with that policy.
15. Bell Farm is listed at Grade II. This is a historic farmhouse which is set back from Bell Green and accessed from it. It has historically faced the village green, and the site forms a remnant of that open space. Because Bell Farm has historically been associated with the village green, this contributes to its significance.
16. Bell Green Cottage is also listed at Grade II. This was originally a pair of cottages dating from the 18th century and is now one dwelling. It is on the southern side of Manse Lane and faces the site. Similar to Bell Farm, the open nature of the site as a remnant of the village green contributes to the significance of Bell Green Cottage.
17. The proposed dwelling would remove part of the historic green and would intrude into the settings of both of those listed buildings. It would for these reasons harm the significance of those heritage assets.
18. This harm would be less than substantial because the effect on the remaining part of the green would be partial. The proposed dwelling would be beneficial in terms of contributing to housing supply, but the Council is able to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites. The economic benefit from construction of the dwelling would be limited. Biodiversity improvements have been offered but no details have been provided and for this reason this cannot be given material weight. The public benefit is not sufficient to outweigh the less than substantial harm to the heritage assets.
19. Policy SCLP11.3 of the LP states that the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework will be applied in respect of heritage assets. Policy SCLP11.4 requires development affecting the setting of a listed building not to harm its character. For the reasons given the proposal would not accord with those policies.
20. Policy SCLP10.4 of the LP requires protection and enhancement of the special qualities and features of the area. The site is within the Plateau Claylands character area in the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). This states that parishes in this landscape tend to consist of multiple clusters of varying sizes and that ribbon development can destroy this pattern.
21. The open area at the junction of Manse Lane and Bell Green is consistent with the pattern of settlement described in the LCA. Because the development would erode this open area it would not accord with Policy SCLP10.4. The proposal would also not accord with Policy SCLP12.34 of the LP which requires protection and enhancement of landscapes.
22. Policy SCLP3.1 of the LP provides for growth, including in rural areas but requires protection and enhancement of the quality of the historic, built and natural environment. For the reasons given the proposal would not accord with that policy.

23. I conclude on this issue, for the reasons given, that the development would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the area.

Accessibility

24. Other than a church, play area and village hall, there are no local services or facilities for day-to-day needs in Cratfield. There is no bus service to any higher order settlement. Consequently, it would be necessary for the occupants of the proposed dwelling to travel by car to access services and facilities on a day-to-day basis. The nearest settlements with any facilities are 5km away and while cycle journeys to those settlements may be possible it is likely that occupiers of the proposed dwelling would be reliant on the car for transport. The proposal is not supported by Policy SCLP7.1 of the LP which requires that development is located close to and provides safe pedestrian and cycle access to services and facilities.
25. I conclude on this issue that the proposal would not be accessible to services and facilities by sustainable means.

Conclusion

26. For the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Nick Palmer

INSPECTOR