



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 October 2023

by J Downs BA(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 November 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/X3540/W/23/3316154

Holly Tree Barns, Bell Green, Cratfield, Suffolk IP19 0DN

- 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 Richard Boddy against the decision of East Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref DC/22/3204/FUL, dated 11 August 2022, was refused by notice dated 13 January 2023.
 - The development proposed is change of use of redundant cart shed to single dwelling and all associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the site is a suitable location for development with regard to the spatial strategy and access to services and facilities by means of transport other than the private car.

Reasons

3. There is no dispute that the site lies outside the settlement boundary for Cratfield. Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (2020) (LP) Policy SCLP3.3 confirms new residential development will not be permitted in the countryside except where allowed by specific policies in the development plan.
4. LP Policy SCLP5.3 sets out the circumstances where housing development would be acceptable in the countryside and allows for conversion of an existing building. LP Policy SCLP5.5 sets detailed policy criteria for such development. Although the cart shed is acknowledged as having no historical significance in its own right, the Historic Environment Supplementary Planning Document (June 2021) (SPD) provides useful advice on assessing the contribution of a building to the landscape.
5. The cart shed is a modest building sat on the boundary of the wider Holly Tree Barns site with the surrounding agricultural fields. There is landscaping adjacent which limits its visibility, but equally serves to integrate the development into the surrounding landscape which does feature tree planting along boundaries. It is characteristic of its rural, farmstead setting and makes sympathetic use of materials, including reclaimed materials. However, its modest dimensions and form are such that it is a neutral feature in the landscape. LP Policy SCLP5.5 requires the building to be converted to make a positive contribution to the landscape.

6. There is a clear distinction between the domestic appearance of the Holly Tree Barns site and the surrounding agricultural land, however both do provide the immediate setting of the cart shed. The proposed extension and alterations to the building would be limited in their scale and extent. Boundary treatments are proposed to establish the private amenity space and the provision of parking spaces. These would have a neutral effect on the immediate setting of the area given their very limited scale. Consequently, the proposed development would not result in the enhancement that LP Policy SCLP5.5 expects.
7. It is not in dispute that the proposed development would not conflict with the other criteria contained within LP Policy SCLP5.5 in that the building is redundant, significant alterations are not proposed, the design maintains the character of the building, there would not be a harmful effect on landscape character, there would not be an adverse effect on ecology and an appropriate access exists. However, all criteria must be met in order for the development to comply with this policy.
8. The site is within walking distance of Cratfield, although this would be along a single width road with no footpath or illumination. Nor have any services and facilities within Cratfield that would support day to day needs been brought to my attention. While cycle storage is proposed, and the surrounding terrain is largely flat, I have not been directed to other settlements in the area which would provide services and facilities for future occupiers and are well related to cycle networks. Furthermore, Bell Green is unlikely to be an attractive cycle route other than to confident cyclists given its narrow width and lack of illumination.
9. It is acknowledged that settlements which contain services and facilities to meet day to day needs would be accessible by car. However, the provision of electric vehicle charging points would not ensure that future occupiers have an electric or hybrid vehicle. While the appellant has referred to a pre-bookable minibus service, I have only been provided with limited information, and no evidence as to the area in which the service operates. There would also appear to be a lack of certainty associated with such a service given it is open to all with no restriction on the purpose of travel. This could constrain its ability to act as a reasonable alternative for day to day needs such as commuting.
10. The proposed development would not result in an isolated dwelling therefore paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework is not germane to this decision. The appellant has referred to a number of other policies in the development plan, however these expand on issues which are addressed in principle by the criteria within LP Policy SCLP5.5 and with which no conflict has been identified. Compliance with these policies would not outweigh the conflict with LP Policy SCLP5.5 which directly refers to the principle of the proposed development.
11. The proposed development would therefore not be a suitable location for the proposed development with regard to the spatial strategy and access to services and facilities by means of transport other than the private car. It would therefore be contrary to LP Policies SCLP3.1, SCLP3.3, SCLP5.3, SCLP5.5 SCLP12.34 and the guidance contained in the SPD which taken together and insofar as they relate to this appeal, seek to direct development to the most sustainable settlements and identify the circumstances in which the conversion

to a dwelling in the countryside would be appropriate. It would also be contrary to LP Policy SCLP7.1 which requires development to be located close to and provide safe pedestrian and cycle access to services and facilities.

12. LP Policy SCLP10.4 is specifically concerned with landscape character, its protection and enhancement and avoiding significant adverse impacts. This is different to the requirements of LP Policy SCLP5.5 with respect to landscape character and as such I do not find conflict with this policy.

Other Matters

13. There would be a social benefit from the delivery of an additional, small dwelling which could be delivered quickly and the associated economic benefits of development. Biodiversity enhancements could also be secured. However, these benefits would be limited given the proposal is for one dwelling and the Council can demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites. While the appellant has put forward that the proposed development would be self build, there is no mechanism before me to ensure that the dwelling would meet the requirements of self build in that the first occupier would be the person involved in its design. I therefore attach limited weight to this.
14. The appeal site has the benefit of an extant planning permission for conversion to a holiday let. However, that proposal would be assessed under different policies than the proposal before me and would not justify allowing a development that conflicts with the relevant policies of the development plan.
15. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the decision maker, in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest. Holly Tree Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building and its significance is derived from its historic and architectural interest as a 16-17 century farmhouse with some surviving original internal and external features. The appeal property is set a short distance away from the farmhouse and its use as a dwelling would, insofar as it relates to the designated heritage asset, be compatible with the present use of the surrounding farmstead. The proposed extension and alterations to the cart shed would be of limited scale and would not change its relationship to Holly Tree Farmhouse. Consequently, the proposed development would have a neutral effect on its setting.
16. There would be appropriate living conditions for future occupants, and suitable provision made for car parking. The proposed extension and alterations would be well related to the existing building. However, these would be expected of any well designed development and are therefore neutral.

Conclusion

17. The proposed development would conflict with the development plan when read as a whole. There are no material considerations of sufficient weight to indicate the decision should be taken otherwise. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

J Downs
INSPECTOR