



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 January 2024

by David Reed BSc DipTP DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 05 March 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/F2605/W/23/3324237

Land at Low Road, Swaffham PE37 7PU

- 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 H Cardus, PSB Services (Norfolk) Ltd against the decision of Breckland District Council.
 - The application Ref 3PL/2021/1683/F, dated 21 December 2021, was refused by notice dated 16 December 2022.
 - The development proposed is the change of use of land to residential and erection of single storey dwelling.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The proposal is for a single storey dwelling on a long irregular shaped site at the end of Low Road, a private driveway which leaves Highfield Avenue near its junction with Lynn Road. The driveway extends for some distance, serving a number of frontage properties, until it passes under a disused railway bridge to reach the appeal site.
4. The site lies outside the settlement boundary of Swaffham as defined by the Breckland Local Plan 2019 (BLP) where Policy GEN05 restricts development to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Development outside settlement boundaries is only acceptable where it complies with other policies in the BLP, none of which apply in this case.
5. The disused east-west railway line and the tall hedgerow which has developed along the old embankment forms a clear edge to the built-up area of Swaffham to the south. This includes the Highfield Avenue estate, frontage housing on Low Road, the recent Acorn Drive development and the Breckland Meadows caravan park. By contrast, north of the embankment lies open countryside, a number of arable fields with open views towards the A47 by-pass.
6. The appeal site comprises an area of rough ground, formerly a railway storage area, next to the embankment. Contrary to the appellant's claim that it is well

screened on all sides, it is essentially open to the adjacent fields to the north, and as such forms part of the rural setting of the town. In this location, on its own and separated by the embankment from the built-up area, even a single storey dwelling would represent an unduly intrusive feature, introducing a solitary residential property with associated hardstanding, car parking and domestic garden into the currently unspoilt countryside. Additional landscaping to screen the dwelling would take many years to become fully established and even then would not fully mitigate the resulting visual impact.

7. For these reasons the proposal would represent an encroachment into the rural setting of the town, significantly detracting from the character and appearance of the area. This would conflict with Policy GEN05 of the BLP which restricts development outside settlement boundaries to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. It would also conflict with Policy HBE2 of the Swaffham Neighbourhood Plan 2019 (SNP) which resists proposals when they would adversely impact the appearance of the town. Due to its incongruous location the proposal would also conflict with Policies COM01 and GEN02 of the BLP which require development to contribute, respect and be sensitive to the character of the surrounding area.

Other matters

8. The appeal site lies within the zone of influence of the Breckland Special Protection Area/Special Area of Conservation where the recreational impact of additional residents may adversely affect their integrity. However, it is understood that a suitable financial contribution towards the Norfolk Green Infrastructure and Recreational Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy has been secured through a unilateral undertaking to overcome this concern.
9. Policy HBE1 of the SNP is mentioned in the reason for refusal but no specific objection is raised to the type or tenure of dwelling proposed.

Conclusion

10. The proposal would provide an additional dwelling which would contribute to local housing needs and have economic and social benefits for Swaffham. No objections have been received from the town council or neighbours. The site is well related to the town with its range of services and facilities, the dwelling would be built of suitable materials, to high environmental standards and would occupy an underused site. However, these benefits do not outweigh the harm that has been identified to the character and appearance of the area and the associated conflict with the development plan.
11. Having regard to the above the appeal should be dismissed.

David Reed

INSPECTOR