



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 August 2024

by F Wilkinson BSc (Hons), MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 August 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/F0935/W/24/3343285

Plot 1 & 2, Land Adjacent North Lodge, Allonby, Maryport, Cumbria CA15 6QQ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Angela Murphy against the decision of Cumberland Council.
 - The application reference is OUT/2024/0001.
 - The development proposed is 2no dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be in a suitable location for housing having regard to the development strategy for the area; and
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area including the landscape character of the Solway Coast National Landscape.

Preliminary Matters

3. The application was submitted in outline with approval of access, layout, landscaping and scale sought. Detailed matters relating to appearance is reserved for future consideration. I have determined the appeal on this basis.
4. In November 2023, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) were renamed as National Landscapes (NLs). This change did not alter their status. I have referred to the Solway Coast NL rather than AONB in my decision.

Reasons

Development Strategy

5. Policy S3 of the 2014 adopted Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) Strategic and Development Management Policies (the SDMP) defines the spatial strategy for the area. It sets out the level of development that is appropriate for different places based on a settlement hierarchy of Key Service Centres, Local Service Centres, Limited Growth Villages, and Infill/Rounding Off Villages.
6. The appeal site lies outside, but close to, the development limit of Allonby. For development plan purposes, the site is therefore within the countryside. Policy S3 of the SDMP limits proposals outside the defined settlements to specific circumstances. Policy SA2 of the 2020 adopted Allerdale Local Plan (Part 2) Site

Allocations (the SA LP) supports proposals outside settlement boundaries where it can be demonstrated that it complies with Policy S3 and other relevant policies.

7. There is no evidence before me to demonstrate that the proposal would satisfy any of the listed circumstances for development outside of defined settlements in Policy S3. The proposed development would therefore conflict with Policies S3 and SA2. To allow the appeal would undermine the planned approach to the distribution of development in the area.
8. Allonby is a Local Service Centre. The supporting text to Policy S3 explains that this tier consists of larger villages with a limited range of services and would accommodate a smaller scale of housing development that will help contribute towards maintaining the vitality of the settlement. There are some limited facilities in Allonby which the site would be near to. Therefore, while the location of the site does not sit well with the settlement hierarchy, in terms of functional connectivity, the proposed dwellings would not be considered as isolated homes in the countryside in the context of paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).
9. Nevertheless, there would be conflict with Policy S3 of the SDMP and Policy SA2 of the SA LP, which seek to focus new development within the settlement boundaries. Due to this conflict, I conclude that the proposal would not be in a suitable location for housing having regard to the development strategy for the area.

Character and Appearance

10. There is limited information before me on the landscape character of the Solway Coast NL. Nonetheless, from what I observed at my site visit it includes an estuary landscape with expansive views outwards to Scotland and the Lake District National Park; a narrow tract of coastal dunes; and a gently undulating inland agricultural landscape. Small settlements and scattered groups of farm buildings and residential properties are present within the landscape.
11. A number of these characteristics are apparent in the landscape in which the site is set. This includes a beach and dune system, rectangular fields enclosed by gappy hedges stretching out behind the coastline, and wide, open views towards Scotland. The built form of Allonby has a linear character where it has developed along the coast, with some small clusters of development extending inland, including a number of holiday caravan parks.
12. The site is part of a wider undeveloped agricultural field. Although it is close to the defined settlement boundary of the village it is separated from the nearest building by the Friends' Burial Ground which lies behind a stone wall which also extends across the front of the site. The open and rural character of the landscape is evident at this point. The site contributes positively to the pastoral setting of the village and the wider character of the Solway Coast NL.
13. The character and appearance of the site would markedly change from an agricultural field to built development. The intrinsic character of the land would be urbanised and there would be encroachment into the countryside. In addition to the two dwellings, there would also be areas of paved driveways, gardens and domestic paraphernalia which would further alter the rural character of the site.

14. Approaching from the north, the proposed development would be seen against the backdrop of the existing buildings on the northern edge of the village. However, from other vantage points, including travelling north along the road through the village, from the car parks between the road and the beach and dunes and nearby stretches of the England Coast Path, the proposed development would be seen as intruding into the open and rural character of the surrounding area.
15. The layout of the dwellings along the road frontage would be consistent with much of the built form of the village. Nevertheless, the incremental spread of built development would diminish the openness of the site and the contribution it makes to the pastoral landscape setting of the village and would contribute to an erosion of the countryside. Intrusion into the landscape would not therefore conserve or enhance the features that contribute to the distinctive landscape character of the area, including the Solway Coast NL. This harm would not be adequately mitigated by the proposed indigenous hedgerow planting.
16. Consequently, being mindful of the scale of the development, I conclude that there would be a modest level of harm to the character and appearance of the area. The landscape character of the Solway Coast NL would be similarly incrementally diminished. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policies S33 and S34 of the SDMP. In summary and amongst other considerations, these policies seek to ensure that landscape character and local distinctiveness are protected, conserved and where possible enhanced, and require development to conserve or enhance the distinctive landscape character and quality of the Solway Coast NL.

Other Considerations

17. The proposal would contribute up to two energy efficient dwellings to the supply of housing. In this regard, it would accord with the objective of the Framework regarding significantly boosting the supply of homes. There would also be social and economic benefits such as construction employment and additional residents supporting local services and facilities. These considerations weigh positively for the proposal. However, I do not afford such benefits very significant weight in the context of the quantum of dwellings proposed.
18. While the comments from the interested parties indicate a need for affordable housing in the area, there is no clear evidence before me to substantiate this. Furthermore, even if the proposed dwellings were to be developed as affordable housing, there is no mechanism in place by which this can be secured and controlled, for example by means of the submission of a completed planning obligation.
19. The site is not in a flood risk area. There is no dispute between the main parties that appropriate vehicle access and drainage could be secured, and that the proposal would not harm the living conditions of nearby residents. However, a lack of harm is effectively neutral in the planning balance.
20. The site is close to the Grade II listed North Lodge, the significance of which is in part derived from its architectural and historic interest as an early nineteenth century building combining a mansion for occasional residence with almshouses. Important contributors in this regard are the architectural

detailing and composition of the built form. The site is within the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site (WHS) Buffer Zone. From the limited information that is before me, the attributes of the outstanding universal value (OUV) of the WHS and its significance, so far as it relates to the proposal, is in part derived from the historical evidence that Hadrian's Wall provides of Roman frontier development, with its landscape setting being important to the understanding of its design and function. Given the nature and scale of the proposal along with the separation distance from the listed building, the significance of the OUV of the WHS and the setting of the listed building would be preserved.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

21. I have found that the proposal would not be in a suitable location for housing as it would undermine the planned approach to the distribution of development. The Framework states that the planning system should be genuinely plan-led. The conflict with the Council's development strategy is therefore a matter which I afford significant weight to.
22. There would also be a modest level of harm to the character and appearance of the area including to the landscape character of the Solway Coast NL. Paragraph 182 of the Framework requires that great weight is given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in NLs.
23. The other considerations in this case are not sufficient to outweigh the conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

F Wilkinson

INSPECTOR