



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 July 2024

by J Pearce MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 September 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/W/23/3334575

Land adj. Aldersfield Place Farm, Ashfield Green, Wickhambrook, Suffolk CB8 8UZ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs I Parker against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref is DC/23/0813/FUL.
 - The development proposed is a new dwelling and access.
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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, including the effect on the significance of the non-designated heritage asset.

Reasons

3. The appeal site comprises part of the garden of Aldersfield Place Farm, a detached two-storey dwelling within extensive grounds extending to the side and rear. While development in the area is varied, dwellings are typically set back from the road within spacious plots behind established hedges. Consequently, the area has an open and verdant character.
4. While Aldersfield Place Farm is not included on a local heritage list, the Council has identified it as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). The appellant refers to Historic England Advice Note 7, which provides guidance on the management of NDHAs and the process to locally list an asset. However, the Planning Practice Guidance states that in some cases, local planning authorities may also identify NDHAs as part of the decision-making process.
5. Notwithstanding this advice and guidance, the appellant's Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) states that the dwelling at Aldersfield Place Farm is a NDHA. The HIA indicates that the NDHA's significance is derived from the level of extant framing of the original building along with the attractive 19th Century front façade. The front façade is appreciable from the road, including on the approach from Wickhambrook. Accordingly, Aldersfield Place Farm has heritage significance in terms of its history, and its architectural and aesthetic value which result in it making a positive contribution to the street scene.
6. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) defines the setting of a heritage asset as the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced.

Setting is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. The setting of the NDHA has evolved through the removal of the former farm buildings and the alterations to the building, including development to the rear.

7. Nonetheless, the site – forming the side garden of Aldersfield Place Farm – has remained undeveloped as shown in the extract from the 1904 Ordnance Survey Map while areas beyond this parcel of land have since been built upon. In combination with the verdant frontage and space to the other side of the dwelling, the spacious garden comprising the site contributes positively to the significance of the NDHA. While development at The Gabions has altered the wider surroundings, the dwellings are on land beyond the site of the former farm buildings, considerably further from the NDHA than the appeal site.
8. Paragraph 209 of the Framework states that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account and that in weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
9. The proposed dwelling would have a substantial width and would fill a large proportion of the side garden between the NDHA and the dwelling at Minori. The size of the dwelling, and its proximity to Aldersfield Place Farm, would considerably reduce the spacious character, whilst the erosion of the space at the site would unbalance the setting of the NDHA. Although the proposal would not physically alter the fabric of the NDHA, the development would diminish the open and verdant setting and would therefore cause moderate harm to the significance of the heritage asset.
10. The dwelling would be set back within the site in a position to the rear of the front elevation of Aldersfield Place Farm. In addition, the proposal would have a lower ridge height than the existing dwelling. The position and scale of the proposal would limit the visual intrusion within the street scene and the attractive design would respect the character and appearance of development in the area. Nevertheless, the considerable width of the development and its proximity to the dwelling at Aldersfield Place Farm would reduce the openness and undermine the ability to understand and appreciate the original and historical significance of the NDHA.
11. I conclude that the proposal would unacceptably harm the significance of the NDHA. The development therefore conflicts with Policy CS3 of the St Edmundsbury Core Strategy 2010 (CS), Policies DM2, DM16, DM22 and DM27 of the Joint Development Management Policies Document 2015 (JDMPD) and the Framework, which collectively require proposals to protect the historic environment and have regard to the setting, not affect adversely the distinctive historic character of the area and take into account the effect on the significance of a NDHA.

Other Matters

12. The appellant has suggested that a building could be erected on the site using permitted development rights. However, I have not been presented with any substantive details, including a Certificate of Lawfulness, to demonstrate that there is a realistic prospect that such a development would take place.

13. Moreover, permission is sought for a dwelling and not an outbuilding incidental to the use of the dwellinghouse. Therefore, I cannot be certain that the effects from permitted development would be comparable to those of the appeal proposal. Accordingly, this matter does not indicate that the proposal's impacts should be accepted.

Planning Balance

14. The Framework does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. The proposal is not in accordance with the aforementioned policies of the CS and the JDMPD, with the associated conflict reflecting the harm to the significance of the NDHA. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and should be refused unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.
15. The proposal would make a positive contribution to housing supply with associated social and economic benefits during the period of construction and once the dwelling is occupied. However, the contribution of a single dwelling to meeting housing need in the area through a more efficient use of land and the associated benefits are limited by the scale of development proposed would not outweigh the identified harm to the significance of the NDHA.

Conclusion

16. The proposal conflicts with the development plan. Material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Pearce

INSPECTOR