
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 September 2024

by Matthew Jones BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 September 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/W/24/3340868

Land Adjacent 1 Coast Road, Porthtowan, Truro TR4 8AQ

- 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 and Mrs T Wonnacott against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA23/04926, dated 14 June 2023, was refused by notice dated 1 February 2024.
 - The development proposed is new dwelling with car parking and garden amenity area.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - The suitability of the site for the proposed development, having regard to the development plan's approach to the supply of housing, with reference to the character and appearance of the area; and,
 - The effect of the proposed development on highway safety.

Reasons

Suitability of the site

3. The appeal site is a long, narrow area of scrub aside and to the west of 1 Coast Road, which is within the residential Atlantic Way estate. The estate forms part of the settlement of Porthtowan, which is dispersed into several discrete areas surrounded by the coastal landscape. A Public Right of Way (the PROW) passes by the west boundary of the site along a track, beyond which is a dense hedgerow separating the site from adjacent fields. The standalone dwellings Glyn Crest and Tawhaven are close by to the north / northwest.
4. Policy 3 of the Cornwall Local Plan: Strategic Policies Document 2010–2030 (adopted 2016) (CLP) supports the 'rounding off' of rural settlements such as Porthtowan. Rounding off is defined by the supporting text of Policy 3 as development on land that is substantially enclosed but outside of the urban form of a settlement and where its edge is clearly defined by a physical feature that also acts as a barrier to further growth (such as a road). It should not visually extend building into the open countryside. The supporting text to Policy 7 of the CLP defines open countryside as the area outside of the physical boundaries of existing settlements (where they have a clear form and shape).

5. 1 Coast Road, Glyn Crest and the field boundary hedgerow together combine to substantially enclose the appeal site. However, its southeast boundary is open to a similarly characterised area of scrub, and therefore this edge is not clearly defined by a physical feature that acts as a barrier to further growth.
6. The Atlantic Way estate has a clear form and shape. The estate is nucleated, turns inward around a network of estate roads, and is set back behind slopes, rear gardens and a variety of soft and hard landscaping features. Coupled with the generally low profile of its built form, the estate appears to attempt to withdraw almost apologetically from view, which aids its relative assimilation into this elevated position. Glyn Crest and Tawhaven are not a natural continuation of the estate but read as anomalous buildings beyond it.
7. The site forms a landscape buffer between Glyn Crest and the PROW and the estate. The PROW is rural in character for most of its length with extensive views of the sensitive landscape around Porthtowan, including the coast and the valley heathland. As one travels north down towards the appeal site, despite the presence of nearby buildings, the eye is drawn to a coastal vista of green hills, sea, sky and distant settlement. Glyn Crest is noticeable in the foreground, but its imposition on these views is weakened by its position largely set down below the PROW, following the topography of the land.
8. The new dwelling would step beyond the estate quite clearly, removing the site's role as an open landscape buffer, with little room to quell its presence. I note that the design of the proposed dwelling has taken cues from the varied housing within the estate. Nonetheless, given its height, proximity and visually proud siting within the slope, the dwelling would be a highly conspicuous, cramped and urbanising feature when viewed from the PROW. The open coastal views from the PROW would be significantly compromised by the dwelling and associated boundary features, soft or otherwise. The proposal would therefore harmfully visually extend building into the open countryside.
9. The main parties have made references to the 2017 Chief Planning Officer's Advice Note - Infill/Rounding off. However, by its nature this document offers officer advice only, and expounds an interpretation of the policy wording that has not been tested by the plan making process. It should not be used as a substitute for or adjunct to the policy language of the CLP, and it has therefore had very little influence in my assessment of the scheme against the CLP.
10. I therefore conclude that the site would not be suitable for the proposed development, having regard to the development plan's approach to the supply of housing, with reference to the character and appearance of the area. The proposal is therefore contrary to the relevant aims of Policies 2, 3, 12 and 23 of the CLP, Policy 10 of the St Agnes Neighbourhood Development Plan (made 2019) and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Highway safety

11. Given the acute angle of the approach, there is good visibility in both directions when attempting to join Coast Road from the track, looking forward eastwards, and using the passenger side wing mirror for views to the west. Whilst one cannot control the future actions of residents, the left turn is so challenging so as to be prohibitive. The right-hand turn is safe, and a nearby parking area would allow adequate space to then turn back westwards. This area is wide

enough so as to allow for suitable westward visibility if leaving it. Alternatively, residents would be able to turn around in the Atlantic Way estate.

12. Good visibility is afforded towards the access track when approaching along Coast Road from the east, so it is unlikely that a conflict would arise where a vehicle would have to reverse out onto Coast Road. The driveway of the proposed dwelling would offer future residents a reversing space to allow passing in the other direction, as logically would the PROW for other vehicles.
13. Ultimately, this is an existing access and whilst accidents have occurred in the nearby area, none are directly attributable to the access in question on the evidence before me. In these circumstances, intensified use of the access with one more dwelling would not significantly alter the established situation.
14. Accordingly, I conclude on this issue that the proposed development would have an acceptable effect on highway safety. It would accord with the relevant objectives of Policies 12 and 27 of the CLP and the Framework in this respect.

Planning Balance

15. The scheme would conflict with the development plan read as a whole. It would provide a single dwelling to the local housing supply, and one which could be restricted to being a principal residence. There would be economic benefits during construction and lasting benefits through a nominal increase in footfall to local facilities. However, the socio-economic benefits of a single dwelling attract modest weight. Overall, there are no other considerations, including the Framework, that serve to outweigh the conflict with the development plan.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons outlined above, and taking all other matters raised into account, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Matthew Jones

INSPECTOR