



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 December 2024

by M Chalk BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 December 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/24/3346821

33 Cootes Lane, Fen Drayton, Cambridgeshire, CB24 4SL

- 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 and Mrs Lockwood against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/04462/FUL.
 - The development proposed is erection of dwelling and ancillary outbuildings, and demolition of existing outbuildings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The National Planning Policy Framework was updated in December 2024. There are no substantive changes related to this appeal, so the views of the main parties were not sought in relation to the update.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is part of the Fen Drayton Former Land Settlement Association Estate (the former Estate). This was one of 20 such estates established across England between the first and second world wars to provide rented smallholdings for the long-term unemployed and later to assist in the production of food during wartime. In the second half of the century changing economic conditions resulted in the decline of agriculture in the area, and it was shut down with the individual smallholdings sold off.
5. The area of Fen Drayton around the appeal site comprising the former Estate is characterised by a patchwork of buildings in a rural fenland settling. Individual houses typically occupy large plots, and most have generous spaces to either side and between their front elevation and the street. This creates an open and spacious character for the area, which is made evident by the flat topography of the area affording long views between and around buildings. Individual houses exhibit variety in materials and detailing, although in the vicinity of the appeal site two-storey houses are typical, with dormers as common features.
6. The Fen Drayton Former Land Settlement Association Estate Supplementary Planning Document provides detailed guidance for new development in the area. Amongst other things, it recommends that new buildings must be

designed having regard to their impact on the surrounding landscape and character. It recognises that the former Estate has a unique character and spatial pattern, and that it is important that any new buildings are not located where they would be out of character with the layout. Policies HQ/1 and NH/2 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (the Local Plan) together require that new development must be of high quality design that respects and retains the local character and distinctiveness of the local landscape.

7. The appeal site comprises a dwellinghouse with a large area to the rear, much of which is occupied by substantial glasshouses. These are not unusual in the area, as many of the plots are or were used as agricultural smallholdings with glasshouses and other buildings of agricultural appearance visible from the appeal site.
8. There is a substantial separation from the host dwelling to the nearest houses to its rear on Middleton Way. This spacing is typical of the immediately neighbouring plots, with the glasshouses being low-level and relatively lightweight features common in the area. Neither the appeal site nor its immediate neighbours have any more substantial structures on the land to their rear of a scale comparable to the proposed development.
9. The proposed house and its associated outbuildings would therefore be a prominent feature within this context due to the height and massing and the substantial separation from any neighbouring house. The development would be visible from Middleton Way. Seen from there it would be much taller than the neighbouring glasshouses, while being set significantly back from the road resulting in a degree of visual isolation not present in neighbouring houses, even allowing for the generous spacing around most of them. With no comparably sited houses on this side of Middleton Way it would be an incongruous feature in the landscape. It would be highly visible in the surrounding area and from neighbouring properties.
10. Policy H/5 of the Local Plan supports redevelopment within the former Estate subject to specified criteria. These include that the proposal involves sustainable development and that it would not occupy a larger footprint than the existing buildings that are being replaced. There is no dispute that the proposed development would accord with these requirements. Furthermore, the council has raised no objection to the detailed design of the house. Given the varied local character in terms of materials and design, and its scale being broadly consistent with that of other local houses, I see no reason to disagree. The absence of harm from these elements of the proposal are nevertheless neutral considerations.
11. My attention has been drawn to nearby housing developments granted permission by the council. The new house to the rear of 31 Cootes Lane differs from the appeal proposal in that it has an access immediately onto Middleton Way. It is therefore seen in the context of other houses on Middleton Way which are similarly related to the street.
12. The approved house on the neighbouring plot at 30 Cootes Lane is like the appeal proposal, in that the site does not face onto Middleton Way. That permission was granted in 2023, after the permission at the neighbouring No 31. If built, it would be seen in the context of that neighbouring property rather than as a visually isolated house, so differs from the appeal proposal.
13. The approved house at the rear of 40A Middleton Way is also like the appeal proposal as it is a backland site. In this case, the separation between the host

dwelling and the approved house is less than is proposed in the case before me. This results in a more compact form of development on the site, retaining more of the open space to its rear and not creating a visually isolated development.

14. The approved house at 29 Cootes Lane is set at the front of the site, next to the host dwelling and in front of 2 existing houses, 29a and 29b. This is an uncommon arrangement in the area. However, the approved house would be seen as part of two pairs of houses on the site. This differs from the appeal proposal which would be visually isolated away from other houses.
15. I have also been referred to a development for affordable housing on Cootes Lane. This comprises a larger number of houses and the development is prominent in the street scene. However, the provision of affordable housing is a benefit that will have weighed in favour of this development and which is not a factor in the appeal proposal.
16. I note as well other permissions granted since 2013 for new houses on Middleton Way, Mill Road and Cootes Lane. However, none of these developments are in such a prominent and visually isolated location as the appeal site.
17. Each of these developments therefore differs from the appeal proposal, limiting the weight that I can ascribe to them in determining this appeal. They have contributed to the ongoing evolution of the character of the area, with an increasing number of houses on the former smallholding sites. Nonetheless, given these differences, none of these developments is so similar that they outweigh the harm that I have identified.
18. The appeal proposal would therefore be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. It would consequently conflict with the identified requirements of policies HQ/1 and NH/2 of the Local Plan.

Planning balance and conclusion

19. The appeal proposal would deliver a new house, supporting the government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes. The new house would be built to a high standard of sustainability, supported in principle by the council's policy for residential development on the former Estate and reflective of other recently approved houses in the area. There would be economic benefits both during construction, and from ongoing support for local services and facilities. These benefits carry moderate weight overall, as the proposal is for a single house.
20. However, the house would be an incongruous feature in the local landscape because of its visual isolation from any neighbouring dwelling and Middleton Way. Given the open, rural character and flat topography of this area this harm attracts significant weight and outweighs the identified benefits that would arise from the development.
21. The appeal proposal therefore conflicts with the development plan. There are no material considerations to indicate this decision should be taken other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

M Chalk

INSPECTOR