
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 December 2024

by E Grierson BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 January 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/L2630/W/24/3344972

Strenneth, Airfield Road, Fersfield, Norfolk IP22 2FF

- 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 Paul Davey against the decision of South Norfolk District Council.
 - The application Ref is 2023/2933.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of outbuilding used for domestic storage at Strenneth Guest House to form separate dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. A revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 12 December 2024. Whilst I have had regard to the revised national policy as a material consideration in my decision-making, planning decisions must still be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance, the issues most relevant to the appeal remain unaffected by the revisions to the Framework. I am therefore satisfied that there is no requirement to seek further submissions on the revised Framework.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposed development would be in a suitable location for housing with regard to the local development strategy and accessibility to services and facilities.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is occupied by a large single storey building which is currently used for domestic storage purposes following its conversion from a piggery in 2003. It is located adjacent to Strenneth Guesthouse and a separate block of self-catering units, with shared access from Airfield Road. It is outside of any defined settlement boundaries within the open countryside. The proposed development would convert this building into a separate residential property, which is intended to be occupied by the appellant.
5. Policy DM1.3 of the South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies Document (the LP) 2015 states all new development should be located so that it positively contributes to the sustainable development of South Norfolk as led by the Local Plan and that permission for development in the countryside outside of the defined development boundaries of settlements will only be granted where specific

development management policies allow for development outside of development boundaries or otherwise demonstrates overriding benefits in terms of economic, social and environmental dimensions as addressed in Policy 1.1.

6. Policy DM2.10 of the LP makes provision for the conversion and re-use of buildings in the countryside for non-agricultural use. It states that the conversion of buildings in the countryside for residential use (Class C3) will only be supported where criteria (a) to (d) are satisfied. Both parties agree that the proposal meets this criteria. The policy goes on to require compelling evidence submitted that the building (e) cannot be practically or viably converted for employment uses and (f) it is a historic or traditionally constructed building worthy of protection and the proposals will enhance the building and/or the setting of other nearby buildings in the countryside.
7. Both the Council and the appellant appear to agree that due to the location of the appeal site, within a residential setting, a holiday let use would be the only suitable employment use for the appeal building. However, the appellant contends that there is no longer a strong demand for tourist accommodation in the area, highlighting a previous planning permission¹ which was granted on the adjacent site to remove a condition in relation to holiday let accommodation. Nevertheless, this decision was issued some time ago and no up to date evidence has been provided demonstrating the current demand for tourist accommodation.
8. I agree that, due to the location, other employment uses in this setting would not be practical. The use of the building as tourist accommodation would be possible, however the level of employment use this would generate would be limited. Nonetheless, the appellant has not provided compelling evidence to show why this would not likely be a viable use and therefore the proposal does not meet the stipulation within criterion (e) of Policy DM2.10 of the LP.
9. The appellant has highlighted a previous planning application² where it was found that an employment use was not appropriate and was therefore granted planning permission in line with this criterion. However, this is not the case in this instance and therefore it does not set a precedent for the appeal proposal.
10. Both parties agree that, as required by criterion (f), the appeal building is not a historic or traditionally constructed building worthy of protection. Therefore, the proposal would also not meet the stipulation within criterion (f) of Policy DM2.10 of the LP.
11. The Council also contend that the appeal site is not located in a sustainable location in terms of accessibility to services and facilities. Paragraph 83 of the Framework highlights that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. This should include consideration of providing support for local services even in a village nearby. There are very few services and facilities in the surrounding area and therefore future occupiers of the dwelling would be required to travel to Bressingham or Diss for their day to day needs.
12. Due to the distance, it is unlikely that these services and facilities would be accessible by foot. Cycling could be possible, however access would be via narrow

¹ 2012/1062

² 2019/1608/F (Holly Farm, Common Road, Bressingham, Norfolk, IP22 2BG)

country lanes with no street lighting, making it an unattractive option in poor weather conditions and during the hours of darkness. Also, whilst there are no traditional bus stops near the appeal site, the appellant has provided details of a school bus in Fersfield and two community bus services which could be used by future occupiers. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that this service would be suitable for all of the future occupier's day to day needs, such as commuting, and therefore they would still be largely reliant on the use of a private vehicle to access the necessary services and facilities.

13. It is noted that Policy 4 of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (the GNLP) 2024 recognises that the use of the private car is particularly important to the rural economy and that the anticipated shift to electric and possibly hydrogen vehicles will assist in reducing emissions in rural areas and that paragraph 110 of the Framework states that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solution will vary between urban and rural areas. However, this does not negate the requirement to offer a genuine choice of transport modes and ensure that safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users. Furthermore, due to the scale of the development, the benefit to services within villages nearby would be limited. Therefore, the proposed development would be given limited weight in relation to paragraph 83 of the Framework.
14. The appellant has referred me to a number of appeal decisions in relation to their proximity to services and facilities. In the case of Fox Lodge³ the proposal related to a conversion scheme which also had a realistic fallback position in place for the provision of two holiday rentals, therefore it is not comparable to the appeal proposal. For the appeal at Land off Church Lane in Guestwick⁴, the Inspector also found that future occupiers would be reliant on private motorised transport. Lastly, in the case of Land north of Picton Road⁵, the site was located much closer to the nearest town than the appeal proposal before me and is therefore not directly comparable.
15. In conclusion, the necessary services and facilities which would be required by the future occupiers of the proposed dwelling would not be readily accessible and a single dwelling would not provide significant support for local services nearby. There are extremely limited sustainable transport options and therefore the future occupiers would largely be reliant on the use of a car to serve their day to day needs on a regular basis. Consequently, the proposed dwelling would not be located within a socially or environmentally sustainable location.
16. Furthermore, as the proposal would not meet the criteria within Policy DM2.10 of the LP, it would not be supported by specific development management policies which allow for development outside of development boundaries. Due to the scale of the scheme, as discussed later in this decision, I also find no overriding benefits in terms of economic, social and environmental dimensions. Therefore, the proposed development would not meet the requirements of Policy DM1.3 of the LP and would not be in an appropriate location for new housing in accordance with the local development strategy.
17. Therefore, for the reasons above, the proposed development would not be in a suitable location for housing with regard to the local development strategy and

³ APP/L2630/W/23/3324375 (Fox Lodge, Mill Lane, Brooke, Norfolk, NR15 1EX)

⁴ APP/K2610/W/20/3260052 (Land off Church Lane, Guestwick, Norfolk, NR20 5QJ)

⁵ APP/L2630/W/18/3197272 (Land north of Picton Road, Tharston, Norfolk, NR15 2YD)

accessibility to services and facilities and would conflict with Policies DM1.3 and DM2.10 of the LP as outlined above.

Planning Balance

18. The appellant states that the Council can not demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing and therefore due to the provisions of footnote 8, paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the Framework should be applied. This is not contested by the Council.
19. In the context of the development, I have found that the proposal would be contrary to policies DM1.3 and DM2.10 of the LP, resulting in development which would not be in a suitable location for housing and would result in environmental harm from the likelihood of a dependency on the use of a car for access to services and facilities. Whilst there is general support for the reuse of redundant or disused buildings, the Framework supports development in locations which are sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. Therefore, whilst some requirements of the policies are somewhat more prescriptive, I find the overarching aim of these policies to be generally consistent with the relevant aims of the Framework, and as such I attach significant weight to the conflict with them.
20. The development would add to the overall housing land supply and make a small contribution to the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, with the addition of a new residential unit. Economic advantages would arise from its construction and its occupation through local spending. The appellant also considers it would visually improve the appearance of the site and that an employment opportunity would also be provided for a new manager to live within the existing guesthouse which is to be vacated by the appellant. However, given the scale of the scheme, any such benefits would be small.
21. Therefore, even if I were to conclude there is a shortfall in the five year housing land supply as suggested by the appellant, given the harm that I have identified, the adverse impact of granting planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the limited benefits of a single dwelling when considered against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole. As a result, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply and does not weigh in favour of the proposed development.
22. The appellant considers that the proposed development would also constitute a self-build dwelling, which is supported outside of defined settlement boundaries under Policy 7.5 of the GNLP, subject to various criteria. However, whilst the Council does have a duty to provide for self-build and custom housebuilding, no evidence has been provided to secure any dwellings for self-build purposes as part of this appeal and therefore the proposal is given limited weight in this regard.
23. The appellant also contends that the proposed conversion would be possible under Class Q of the permitted development rights which allows for the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential dwellings. However, if this was the case, such permitted development would still require prior approval from the Council and no evidence has been provided to demonstrate that this has or will be applied for should planning permission not be forthcoming. As such, any such fallback position is given limited weight.

24. The personal circumstances which have led to the need for the proposed development are noted. However, I see no evidence as to why the necessary ground floor accommodation could not be provided within the existing residential accommodation and therefore this need is given limited weight which would not outweigh the harm identified.

Other Matters

25. The appeal site is located adjacent to the grade II listed building, Row Farmhouse. Limited information has been submitted in relation to this listed building. However, it appears that its significance is derived, at least in part, from the antiquity of its structure and from its status as a well preserved example of a vernacular building of its age and type. The rural setting of the surrounding area contributes to how this asset is appreciated and this setting makes a positive contribution to the significance of this listed building.
26. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the decision maker, in considering whether to grant planning permission for the development which affects a listed building or its setting, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any feature of special architectural or historic interest. However, the appeal building is well separated from the listed building and there would be limited changes to its scale and appearance. Therefore, the proposal would have a neutral impact on the setting of the grade II listed Row Farmhouse.
27. Whilst very limited information has been provided, in their report, the Council indicate that the proposed development is liable for a contribution under the Green Infrastructure Recreational Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (GIRAMS). The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) requires the decision maker to undertake an Appropriate Assessment (AA) where there are likely significant effects from the proposal, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. However, no further evidence has been provided to me on this matter and regulation 63(1) indicates the requirement for an AA is only necessary where the competent authority is minded to give consent for the proposal. Therefore, in view of my overall conclusions resulting in my decision to dismiss the appeal, it has not been necessary to address this in any further detail.

Conclusion

28. Therefore, for the reasons given above and having had regard to all other matters raised, the proposal would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole and I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

E Grierson

INSPECTOR