



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 April 2025

by F Harrison BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 May 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/W/24/3349398

Land West of Grove View, Upthorpe Road, Stanton, Suffolk IP31 2AP

- 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 Mr and Mrs G Priestman against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref is DC/24/0384/OUT.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a pair of semi-detached infill dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development above is taken from the application form, omitting wording that is not an act of development. The application was made in outline, with all matters reserved for future consideration except access. I have considered the appeal on this basis but had regard to the proposed plans, insofar as they are a potential way that the appeal site could be developed.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the appeal site is a suitable location for housing, having regard to the Council's spatial strategy; and
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, bearing in mind that it would be in the setting of a Grade II listed building.

Reasons

Location

4. The appeal site falls outside of any settlement boundary and is defined as being within the countryside under Policy CS4 of the St Edmundsbury Core Strategy (2010) (CS). In line with the vision for the management of growth set out in CS Policy CS1, CS Policy CS13 requires development within the countryside to be strictly controlled to protect its character and appearance.
5. Policy DM5 of the Joint Development Management Policies Document (2015) (JDMPD) sets out the circumstances under which development in the countryside may be acceptable, including small scale residential development of a small undeveloped plot where it accords with JDMPD Policy DM27. This policy requires development to be within a closely knit cluster of 10 or more existing dwellings

adjacent to or fronting an existing highway and to consist of infilling of a small undeveloped plot by one dwelling or a pair of semi-detached dwellings, commensurate with the scale and character of the existing dwellings within an otherwise continuous built-up frontage. There is no definition of 'closely knit cluster' or 'small plot'; as such the assessment required under Policy DM27 is a matter of planning judgement.

6. The existing dwellings adjacent to and fronting Upthorpe Road in the vicinity of the appeal site form a low-density pattern of development owing to extensive gaps between the properties created by generous plot sizes and intervening parcels of open land. Due to significant separation distances generally between the dwellings, a continuous pattern of concentrated residential development does not exist. The sparse nature of the development is readily apparent when travelling along Upthorpe Road where the existing dwellings do not appear as a group. Consequently, it is my view that the proposal would not be part of a closely knit cluster, nor can the appeal site be described as a small plot within an otherwise continuous built-up frontage, as required by JDMPD Policy DM27.
7. The proposal would substantially fill the existing open site, undermining a visually important gap that contributes positively to the character and distinctiveness of the rural scene. Furthermore, the introduction of a pair of semi-detached properties at the site would result in plot sizes and spacing between dwellings that is not similar to adjacent dwellings, which are generally detached properties set within spacious plots. In doing so, the proposal would not be commensurate with the scale and character of existing dwellings in this section of Upthorpe Road and would not respect the rural character of the locality.
8. Given its proximity to adjacent built form the appeal site would not be isolated in the context of Paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). However, the proposal would fail to meet the requirements of the JDMPD for development in the countryside. Moreover, even though the appeal site is undeveloped, has frontage to Upthorpe Road, and even if it would be policy compliant with regard to the environment and highway safety, this would not negate the conflict with the other requirements of JDMPD Policy DM27.
9. My attention has been drawn to other appeals¹ in the district where proposals on sites in the countryside have been allowed. However, in the Bury Road appeal the Inspector found the site to be within a continuous row of dwellings, and in the Flempton scheme the Inspector concluded that it would be viewed as part of an existing group of dwellings, would assimilate well into its surroundings and would not have an impact on the countryside character. As set out above, I have not found this appeal site to display these characteristics. From the information that has been provided the contexts of the other appeal sites therefore differ from this appeal and are not directly comparable, and so the other appeal decisions do not lead me away from my above findings.
10. To conclude on this main issue, the proposal would not be in a suitable location for housing, having regard to the Council's spatial strategy. It would conflict with CS Policies CS1, CS4 and CS13, and JDMPD Policies DM5 and DM27.

¹ Appeal refs: APP/F3545/W/23/3316413 and APP/F3545/W/20/3244428, as provided by the appellant.

Character and appearance

11. The appeal site comprises part of the garden of Grove View, a detached dwelling within extensive grounds extending to the side and rear. Development in the area is varied in design and appearance, however dwellings are typically set back from the road within spacious plots, with established hedges and vegetation bounding the road. The combination of built form interspersed with undeveloped land in this section of Upthorpe Road creates a spacious character with open qualities and forms a key part of the character and appearance of the area. While the wider area features a park home site and industrial development with more urban qualities, the proposal would not generally be seen in context with these developments such that they do not form part of the immediate context.
12. The proposal would be a detrimental intrusion into the openness currently provided by the site. It would alter the prevailing pattern of development and in doing so, undermine the relationship between built form and open space and have an urbanising effect which would be readily apparent when travelling along Upthorpe Road in either direction. Despite being set back from the road, and even though the existing hedgerow would be largely retained and gaps in hedgerows for access are a feature in the area, the proposal would represent a marked visual change, harmfully eroding the open qualities of the site that contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area. Notwithstanding that appearance, scale and form are reserved matters and even if the proposed dwellings would reflect the Suffolk vernacular, the proposal would visually compete with the balance between spaces and buildings in the area.
13. The appeal site is also in proximity to a Grade II listed building known as High Elm Farmhouse, which is set back from the road. The special interest and significance of this asset primarily stems from its architectural and historic interest and associated appearance. Although screened in some views by the converted hayloft and stables known as High Elm Farm Cottage, there is no substantive evidence that the change of use of these buildings has diminished the significance of the heritage asset. Pertinent to the appeal, the listed building's special interest and significance is also derived, to a greater or lesser extent, from its largely open and countryside setting which includes the appeal site. When the surrounding hedgerows and trees are not in leaf, as at the time of my site visit, the open setting allows views of the asset from which the architectural and historic interest can be appreciated. As an open parcel of land, the appeal site therefore makes a positive contribution to the setting of the listed building.
14. Given my findings above that the proposal's quantum of built form would urbanise the prevailing character and appearance of the area, it therefore follows that taking account of the location, extent and nature of the proposal in relation to High Elm Farmhouse, the setting of this asset would not be preserved and the contribution it makes to the asset's significance would be harmed. It would not meet the requirements of Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 or the provisions in the Framework regarding the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. Bearing in mind the scale and nature of the proposal relative to the designated heritage asset, the degree of harm would be less than substantial. In these circumstances, the Framework states that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits. I will return to this matter later.

15. Overall, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area, failing to preserve the setting of a Grade II listed building and harming its significance. It would conflict with CS Policy CS3 and JDMPD Policies DM2, DM13, DM22 and DM15. Amongst other things, these policies require proposals to be designed to respect the character, scale and density of the locality to create a strong sense of place and distinctiveness. In addition, the character of the landscape is required to be protected, and the setting of listed buildings should be respected, including inward and outward views.

Heritage Balance

16. The harm to the setting of High Elm Farmhouse would be less than substantial harm. The Framework requires that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, irrespective of the level of harm. Any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset should also require a clear and convincing justification. Nevertheless, the Framework also requires such harm to be weighed against any public benefits.
17. The proposal would deliver two family homes, for which there is said to be a high demand. Notwithstanding that there is considerable support for boosting the supply of homes, given the scale of the proposal, this social benefit attracts limited positive weight. Taking account of the site's rural location, the proposal would be relatively accessible, providing opportunities for walking and using public transport for those that would choose to use them. This environmental benefit attracts limited positive weight.
18. There would also likely be some time limited economic benefits during the construction stage, and some economic benefits arising from expenditure by future occupiers. Albeit there is limited guarantee of the extent to which this would be directed to local businesses or services or contribute to sustaining Stanton or other villages nearby. I give each of these benefits limited positive weight.
19. Taking the above into consideration, overall, even cumulatively, the sum of the public benefits of the proposal would not outweigh the harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset that I have identified, and the considerable importance and weight this carries.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

20. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. I have found that the proposal would not be in a suitable location and would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, including the significance of a listed building, in conflict with development plan policies, to which I attach significant weight. I will now consider whether there are material considerations that would indicate that my decision should be made otherwise than in accordance with the development plan.
21. The social, environmental and economic benefits outlined in the heritage balance each carry limited weight. The proposal would not be harmful to biodiversity or highway safety with regard to access and car parking. However, these matters, and any other policy compliance including land contamination, are neutral factors which weigh neither for nor against the proposal.

22. The appellant refers in their submissions to the Framework's presumption in favour of sustainable development. However, there is no substantive evidence to suggest that the approach set out in Framework paragraph 11(d) should be applied in this particular case.
23. The proposal would result in benefits, but it would also cause harm, in conflict with the development plan. Weighing the two up is a matter of planning judgement. In this case, the material considerations are insufficient to indicate a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan.
24. Accordingly, for the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

F Harrison

INSPECTOR