
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 June 2025

by A Hickey MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/L2630/W/24/3356677

Land to the West of Chequers Road, Tharston, just to the north of Tharston industrial estate

- 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 Taylor against the decision of South Norfolk District Council.
 - The application Ref is 2023/2307.
 - The development proposed is described as five new detached, single storey dwellings, one to be a self-build, all three bedroomed. To include parking, gardens and biodiversity enhancements.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the description of development and site address above from the application form. Although different to that given on the decision notice, no confirmation has been provided that a change was agreed. I have however changed the compass direction from east to west to reflect the appeal site's location on Chequers Road.
3. The application sought outline planning permission with all matters reserved except for access. I have determined the appeal as such, and any details in relation to the reserved matters have been considered on an illustrative basis.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - whether the site is a suitable location for new housing having regard to the provisions of local and national policy.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal site forms part of a large field located outside of but adjacent to the development boundary for Long Stratton. It is a flat grassland site, with Public Rights of Way (Prows) to the northern and southern boundaries. From the appeal site, looking west are open views of the wider verdant landscape.

6. Whilst there is existing development to both the north and south, the absence of built form on the appeal site and open views beyond contributes positively to the area's character on the settlement edge. Together with the undeveloped land opposite, the appeal site forms an important visual gap and transition between the built form of the settlement and the countryside beyond.
7. The appeal site is located within Landscape Character Area B1 – Tas Tributary Farmland Landscape Character Area (LCA). The LCA includes framed open views, large open arable fields and small blocks of deciduous woodland of high visual quality that create wooded horizons which add variety to the landscape. The principal sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the landscape to change include the potential for incremental development and infill.
8. The scale, layout and design of the proposed dwellings would be determined at the reserved matters stage. Nonetheless, introducing built development into this open gap would encroach further into the countryside, erode the area's rural character and harmfully interrupt views of the wider landscape from Chequers Road. Additionally, the introduction of built form would urbanise the site, which would be especially evident to users of the Prows.
9. It has been suggested that this wide gap could be obscured by the planting of trees/ tall hedgerows and this would negate the view and the sense of openness from the road. However, no such planting is present, and in any event, future planting would also take some time to mature.
10. Given the number of objections received to the appeal scheme, I am also unconvinced that additional planting as part of the development would be appreciated by users of the Prows or that the tapered edge to the proposal alleviates the loss of the pleasing and verdant open views of the LCA from the surrounding area.
11. For these reasons, the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area, conflicting with Policy 2 of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) and Policy DM4.5 of the South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies Document (SNLP). Together, amongst other matters, these seek to create beautiful, well-designed places and buildings that respect, conserve and where possible, enhance the landscape character of its immediate and wider environment. For similar reasons, it would also conflict with Policy DC7 of the Long Stratton Neighbourhood Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which seek new development to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and be sympathetic to local landscape character. Given the long-lasting nature of such effects, I attribute significant weight to the conflict.

Suitable location

12. The site lies outside any development boundary and for the purposes of Planning Policy is considered as countryside. Policy DM1.3 of the SNLP addresses new development in the countryside and allows for two instances where development will be permitted outside of settlement boundaries. Either it complies with another specific development plan policy or allocation or it demonstrates overriding benefits in terms of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development as addressed in Local Plan Policy DM1.1.

13. The appellants have stated that the appeal scheme should have been determined prior to the adoption of the GNLP. Whilst I do not know the full history of the scheme's determination, it was nonetheless determined in accordance with the development plan in place at the time. Moreover, the appellants accept that the development does not accord with GNLP Policy 7.5 as up to 5 dwellings are proposed.
14. No other specific policies have been cited that would support the proposal as required by SNLP Policy DM1.3. In such cases, this policy requires an assessment of whether the development demonstrates overriding benefits in terms of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.
15. In terms of the benefits, the proposal would provide five additional dwellings of a desirable size to the Council's housing supply in this area, including one in the form of a self-build dwelling. Five additional properties, which could be occupied by older people or those with disabilities, would align with the Government's aim to boost the supply of housing, including for those wishing to commission or build their own homes. These dwellings would also be located within an area that provides access to services and facilities to the adjacent settlement.
16. Given the Council's housing land supply position, which I return to later, I therefore afford these matters great weight, although I recognise that five dwellings, even if one is self-build, offer only a limited benefit. As such, only moderate weight can be given to these matters.
17. There would be some economic benefits from the proposal, both during the construction phase and as a consequence of future occupier spending. The proposal would also provide for some environmental benefits through energy-efficient dwellings, landscape enhancements, and biodiversity net gains. Given the size of the site, I attach modest weight to these benefits.
18. There is no substantive evidence before me that the dwellings proposed would have a positive effect on road speeds in the area. Additionally, a lack of other harm, in terms of impact on neighbouring properties, flooding, or highways, is what would be expected of most developments. As such, a lack of harm in these regards would at most carry limited weight in favour of the proposal.
19. Taken together, although the development would deliver some benefits in terms of the three strands of sustainable development, these would be modest. Against these benefits, I have identified significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, the benefits of the scheme do not clearly outweigh its harms, and the overriding benefits described by Policy DM1.3 of the SNLP do not exist.
20. For the above reasons, the appeal site would not be a suitable location for new housing. It would therefore be contrary to Policies 1 and 7.5 of the GNLP, Policy DM1.3 of the SNLP, which seek, amongst other things, to create sustainable patterns of development.

Other Matters

21. The site lies within the Zone of Influence of one or more European Sites comprising the Norfolk Green Infrastructure and Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (GIRAMS). The scheme proposes five additional dwellings. As

such, there is a reasonable likelihood that the European Sites within the area would be accessed for recreational purposes by future occupiers of the appeal scheme.

22. Additionally, as the site is within the catchment of The River Wensum and The Broads Special Area of Conservation, the nutrient impacts of the proposal would need to be considered. As the competent decision making authority, if I had been minded to allow the appeal, it would have been necessary for me to complete an Appropriate Assessment for this scheme. However, as the appeal is being dismissed for other reasons, I have not taken the matter further. In any event, this would not have amounted to a benefit but negated harms.
23. I note the appellants' comments on the reasons for refusal of a previous development on the site and the extension of the nearby industrial estate. However, the extension to the industrial estate is materially different to the proposal in what is presently a wide-open gap. These matters have not, therefore, been determinative to my findings as I have considered the development on its own merits.

Planning Balance

24. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act provides that the appeal should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
25. There is no dispute between the main parties that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land. As such, paragraph 11 of the Framework is engaged. In such cases, paragraph 11 d) ii) of the Framework identifies that planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impact of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.
26. The most relevant policies for determining this appeal relate to character and appearance, and the spatial strategy for directing development to appropriate locations.
27. I have outlined above the scheme's benefits in terms of the three dimensions of sustainable development. However, these benefits, when considered collectively, are modest. Consequently, the harm caused by the proposal's conflict with the development plan would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

Conclusion

28. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, to lead me to a decision other than in accordance with the plan. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A Hickey

INSPECTOR