



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 June 2025

by J Pearce MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y2620/W/24/3357783

Land East of Williams Barn, Church Road, West Beckham, Norfolk NR25 6NX

- 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 Robert McNeil-Wilson against the decision of North Norfolk District Council.
 - The application Ref is PO/23/2643.
 - The development proposed is the erection of one dwelling, car port building and ancillary works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The application form states that the site address is 'Land to the south east of Williams Barn', whereas the decision notice and appeal form refer to the site as 'Land East of Williams Barn'. I have taken the address from the decision notice and appeal form as this is more precise. I do not consider that this has prejudiced any of the parties and I have proceeded with the appeal on this basis.
3. The proposal is for outline planning permission, and the application form makes clear that approval is also sought at this stage for access but not for appearance, landscaping, layout and scale. Drawings have been submitted showing the proposed layout, elevations and floor plans for the proposed dwelling and the car port building. I have treated the layout, elevations and floor plans as being for illustrative purposes and have considered the appeal on this basis.
4. The appellant has submitted a completed form in respect of Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972. In addition, the appellant has made a payment in relation to the Norfolk Green Infrastructure and Recreational Impact Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (GIRAMS). I shall return to this later in my decision.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:
 - whether the site is a suitable location for housing having regard to development plan policy and accessibility to services and facilities; and
 - the effect of the proposed development on highway safety.

Reasons

Suitable location

6. The appeal site is to the east of the dwelling at Williams Barn, which forms part of West Beckham. Policy SS 1 of the North Norfolk Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2008 (CS) sets out the spatial strategy for the district and states that the majority of new development will take place in the towns and larger villages. A small amount of new development will be focused on a number of designated Service Villages and Coastal Service Villages. West Beckham is not identified under Policy SS 1 as falling under any of the categories of settlement where development would be supported and is therefore identified as countryside for the purposes of the spatial strategy. Within the countryside, development will be restricted to particular types of development to support the rural economy, meet affordable housing needs and provide renewable energy.
7. Policy SS 2 of the CS goes on to state that in areas designated as countryside development will be limited to that which requires a rural location and where it complies with one or more of a list of exceptions. While the appellant indicates that the proposal would support affordable and self-build housing, there is no mechanism before me, including a planning obligation, that would secure the proposal as an affordable and/or self-build dwelling. Moreover, although the proposal would include energy efficiency measure through the use of renewable energy, the development is not primarily for the provision of renewable energy. Therefore, the proposal would not meet any of the identified exceptions under Policy SS 2 and would thus conflict with Policies SS 1 and SS 2 of the CS.
8. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. However, Paragraph 83 states that housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. While West Beckham has a public house and a church, the settlement is remote from everyday services and facilities in larger settlements.
9. There is a lack of suitable footways and street lighting, which may discourage walking and cycling. In addition, there is no indication as to the proximity of bus stops to the site or the service provision available. Accordingly, the likelihood is that future occupiers would be highly reliant on private vehicles to access facilities and services in larger settlements. The appellant indicates that the increased use of electric vehicles would make the site more sustainable. Nonetheless, there is no mechanism before me that would obligate future occupants of the dwelling to use electric vehicles only.
10. I conclude that the site is not a suitable location for housing having regard to development plan policy and accessibility to services and facilities. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policies SS 1 and SS 2 of the CS as set out above. Moreover, the development would conflict with Policies SS 4 and SS 6, which collectively require that all development proposals will contribute to the delivery of sustainable development and have good access to infrastructure, open space, public services and utilities.

Highway safety

11. The existing dwelling at Williams Barn is served by two vehicular accesses from The Street, including one shared with the neighbouring dwelling at Shrublands. The Street is a country lane of limited width subject to a 30 miles per hour speed restriction. The narrow verges and established hedgerows to the sides of the lane contribute to the verdant rural character of the area and constrain the space either side of the carriageway. The front boundaries of properties in The Street are primarily formed by low walls and planting, enclosing the space on either side of the carriageway and limiting visibility.
12. The proposed dwelling would be served solely by one of the two existing accesses serving Williams Barn and is close to the boundary of the site. While an existing access, the proposal would lead to a likely intensification in the use of the access above the existing level of use. The submitted plans do not indicate the visibility splays achievable at the access. Visibility at the access to the proposed dwelling is restricted by the proximity of the wall and hedge to the front boundary of the neighbouring property, which is outside the ownership of the appellant. Given the limited width of the carriageway and the features on either side of the road, including the wall and hedge to the front boundary of the neighbouring property, I cannot be certain that suitable visibility can be achieved to facilitate safe egress from the site. Consequently, it has not been demonstrated that the proposal would not increase the risk of collisions.
13. Planning permission was granted under application reference PF/11/1114 (the 2011 permission) for a garden room, car port, workshop and garden store building. The permission included the repositioning of the access and appears to be related to the existing dwelling at Williams Barn. In addition, the planning history indicates that a new access was granted under application reference PF/95/0547 for the conversion of a building to form a new dwelling. While the information before me in respect of these earlier proposals is limited, the 2011 permission was for a use ancillary to the existing dwelling at Williams Barn, limiting the potential for an increase in vehicle movements.
14. While a plan showing the visibility splays have not been provided, it is likely that in order to achieve adequate visibility, existing trees and hedgerows would need to be removed. The removal of such features, notwithstanding that some may be outside of the appellant's ownership, would urbanise the area and would harm the verdant rural character of The Street. Accordingly, the proposal would conflict with Policies EN 2 and EN 4 of the CS, which collectively require proposals to protect, conserve and where possible enhance the special qualities and local distinctiveness of the area and expect proposals to and retain existing important landscaping and natural features.
15. I conclude that the proposal would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety. The development therefore conflicts with Policy CT 5 of the CS, which requires that the proposal provides for safe and convenient access, and the Framework, which requires that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users and that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

Planning Balance

16. The Framework does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. The proposal is not in accordance with the aforementioned policies of the CS, with the associated conflict reflecting that the site is not a suitable location for housing and the proposal would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and should be refused unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.
17. The Council concedes that it is currently unable to demonstrate at least a five year supply of deliverable housing sites that the Framework requires. Paragraph 11. d) of the Framework indicates that permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.
18. The appellant states that the dwelling would make a contribution to meeting the Council's requirements in respect of self-build and custom housing. Nonetheless, there is no substantive evidence before me that demonstrates that the Council is not meeting its requirements in this regard. Moreover, there is no mechanism before me, including a planning obligation, that would ensure that the proposed dwelling would contribute to the delivery of self-build and custom housing, or in respect of affordable housing.
19. The proposal would deliver a single dwelling that would provide a boost to the supply of housing through the efficient use of land. The Framework explains that small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area and are often built-out relatively quickly. In addition, the proposal would deliver social and economic benefits both during construction through the creation of jobs, and following occupation through the use of facilities and services in the surrounding settlements. However, the contribution of a single dwelling and the associated benefits are limited by the scale of development proposed.
20. The proposal would also provide an opportunity to deliver biodiversity net gain (BNG). While the appellant indicates that a BNG of 25% is achievable on-site, the accompanying Biodiversity Net Gain Screening report¹ states that the proposal could achieve a BNG target of 10% through off-site habitat interventions. The Council indicates that this could be secured by way of a condition in the event that the appeal were to be allowed. I therefore attribute moderate weight to the potential biodiversity enhancements resulting from the proposal.
21. The appeal site is within West Beckham, a small settlement with a built-up area focussed primarily on The Street. The parties agree that the site is part of a garden within a built-up area and would include the removal of an existing building. The definition of previously developed land in the Framework excludes land in built-up areas such as residential gardens and also states that it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed. Consequently, the weight I attach to this consideration is limited.

¹ Dated 05/2024, prepared by Envance

22. The scheme would deliver an energy efficient dwelling, utilising renewable energy features. Moreover, while the scale, design and layout of the dwelling are reserved matters, the indicative plans indicate that the dwelling would not harm the character and appearance of the area. Nevertheless, these elements are minimum requirements of planning policy and therefore attract minimal weight.
23. The appellant has drawn my attention to an appeal decision² for a bungalow within a National Landscape and the Green Belt in Langbar, Ilkley. The details before me in respect of the circumstances of this appeal decision are limited. Nevertheless, while the proposal conflicted with the locational requirements for development, the proposal included the removal of a business use and the demolition of commercial buildings, the benefits of which contributed towards outweighing the adverse impacts. The proposal at Langbar is not therefore directly comparable to the appeal proposal before me. In any event, each proposal should be considered on its individual merits and with appropriate regard to the development plan and any material considerations.
24. In the particular circumstances of this case, I have concluded that the proposal would not be a suitable location for housing, the proposal would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety, and would conflict with the relevant policies of the development plan and the Framework. The adverse impacts would therefore significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies of the Framework as a whole. Therefore, the proposal does not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

European Designated Sites

25. The site lies within the Zone of Influence of a number of European designated sites. The Council has confirmed that the GIRAMS is now in place and aims to deliver strategic mitigation necessary to avoid likely significant effects from planned residential and tourism growth. The GIRAMS sets out a tariff for certain types of new development in order to contribute to the mitigation of any adverse effects.
26. In the Council's Officer Report, it states that the GIRAMS payment in relation to this proposal has not been made. The appellant has provided a completed Section 111 form and a receipt from the Council confirming payment of the same amount. However, as I am dismissing the appeal on other matters, there is no need for me to consider this matter further or for me to undertake an appropriate assessment in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Conclusion

27. The proposal conflicts with the development plan. The material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

J Pearce

INSPECTOR

² APP/U2750/W/25/3362453