



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 August 2025

by P Terceiro BSc MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 August 2025.

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/W/25/3363469

Land adjoining The Three Ways Public House, Cowlinge, Suffolk, CB8 9QD

- 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 Gert van Rooijen against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref is DC/22/1264/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the erection of detached single storey accommodation block for bed and breakfast customers.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have used the address provided within the application form in the banner heading above, as it accurately describes the location of the appeal site.
3. During the appeal the West Suffolk Local Plan 2025 (LP) was adopted by the Council. The Council has subsequently provided details of those relevant development plan policies, and the appellant has had an opportunity to comment on them and so has not been prejudiced. I will refer to the new policies in the determination of this appeal.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - whether the proposed development would be appropriate in terms of flood risk.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal site lies within a prominent position at the crossroads between Queen Street, Mill Lane and Erratts Hill. It is in Cowlinge, which predominantly comprises a linear pattern of residential development interspersed with blocks of woodland and agricultural fields. The village green is located opposite the site. Taken together, these factors contribute to providing the surrounding area with an attractive, leafy and rural character.

6. The site accommodates the Three Ways public house, a detached two storey building that has been enlarged with single storey extensions. Vehicular access into a parking area located across the site's frontage is provided directly off Queen Street. There is an outdoor seating area next to the building which is laid to lawn.
7. There is a largely undeveloped parcel of land immediately adjacent to the host building. The land has some vegetation along its boundary with the road. As such, it makes a positive contribution to the rural character of the area. The proposal would be located on this land.
8. The proposed development, comprising a detached building with associated vehicular access point and large parking area would introduce a large amount of built form within the currently natural and green site. The footprint of the proposed building would be excessively deep in relation to the width and stepped in towards the rear. Consequently, the building would appear unbalanced and contrived, with long and poorly articulated side elevations. Moreover, while single storey, given the excessive footprint and mass, the proposal would fail to appear subservient to its host.
9. The excessive footprint would also result in there being little distance between the building and the site's boundaries, which would limit the opportunities to provide appropriate landscaping to assist in softening the impact. Despite its set back, the building would be visible from Mill Lane through the site access. As such, the proposal would appear as a cramped and uncomfortable form of development, which would be at odds with the prevailing character of the area.
10. Thus, the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It would conflict with LP Policies SP7, LP9, SP4, SP24 and LP12. Among other things, these policies require development to be sympathetic to the local character of the landscape, create a sense of place, contribute to a high quality environment, reserve space for the planting of new trees, and support proposals for the expansion of all types of businesses in the countryside where they recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Flooding

11. The Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) confirms that the proposed development would include sleeping accommodation at ground floor and therefore safe refuge within the building will not be appropriate. Given the location of the proposed access to the site, safe access and egress would not be possible to and from the site without the intervention of emergency services. Accordingly, the FRA advises that an emergency evacuation plan would be required to ensure safe access/egress during a flood event.
12. The emergency evacuation plan provided with the appeal shows two possible evacuation routes on foot which could be used by guests to reach dry land. However, the evacuation plan does not show the route in relation to the predicted flood level.

13. In any event, one such route directs guests to the south of the building, and it appears from the FRA that, should guests use this route, they would be required to walk through to up to 0.6m of flood water, with a hazard rating of danger for most in the case of a 0.1% AEP event. The alternative route directs guests to the north of the building. However, this would similarly require guests to walk through a depth of up to 0.6m of flood water with a hazard rating of danger for most in the case of a 0.1% AEP event.
14. Therefore, without an access or escape route that could be used safely and conveniently, the risk posed to future guests would not be fully mitigated and there would be unacceptable residual effects. In the absence of a safe and effective evacuation plan, together with the vulnerability of future users, I am not persuaded that the development would be safe for its lifetime.
15. The FRA considers the site to be at a low to moderate risk from surface water flooding. Both parties direct me to the Environment Agency's (the EA) standing advice, which recommends that the finished floor levels should be a minimum of whichever is higher of 600mm above the: average ground level of the site; adjacent road level to the building(s) or estimated river or sea flood level for the site.
16. The FRA sets out that the average ground level is approximately 97.4mAOD and the predicted maximum surface water flood level would be some 97.9mAOD. The proposed finished floor level would be roughly 97.7mAOD, which would fall below the EA's standing advice.
17. However, the FRA has put forward additional flood resilience and resistance measures that would be incorporated up to at least 600mm above the maximum surface water flood level (i.e. 98.5mAOD). These include low permeability construction materials and flood resistant doors and windows, which would assist in reducing the risk of the building being inundated. Sensitive electrical equipment, wiring and sockets would be raised and access to all spaces would be allowed to enable drying and cleaning. As such, I am satisfied that the proposed measures would be appropriate, and it is likely that the building could be quickly brought into use without significant refurbishment.
18. Consequently, while the proposed flood resilience and resistance measures would be appropriate, the evacuation plan submitted is insufficient. Therefore, the proposal would not be appropriate in terms of flood risk. It would fail to accord with LP Policies SP1 and SP2, which require development to take account of the climate and environment emergency through good design.

Other Matters

19. While I note the examples provided, these mostly relate to developments of a different nature to the proposal before me, including dwellings, householder extensions, stables and barns, so they would not be comparable with the appeal scheme. Reference is made to other public houses elsewhere which benefit from guest accommodation. However, I do not have full details of the circumstances that led to these developments being accepted. Consequently, I cannot conclude that they represent a direct parallel to the appeal proposal, including in respect of development plan policy. As such, I have determined the appeal in its own merits.

20. I have carefully considered the comments made by the appellant in respect of the unsuitability of the alternative layouts considered. Nevertheless, this would not overcome the harm I have identified.
21. I understand that the proposal follows a previous planning application which was withdrawn. Whereas it may be that the size of the building has been reduced, as set out above, I find that the proposal would be harmful to the character of the area in its own right.
22. While the Council refers to the host building as historic, it confirms that it would not be classed as a non-designated heritage asset. Accordingly, I have not considered this matter any further.

Planning Balance

23. The proposal would support an existing small business by providing much needed accommodation. It would create new employment opportunities, encourage tourism to the local area and assist with the long-term viability of the public house. Some economic benefits would arise from the construction and during occupation. The proposal would foster community engagement. I ascribe these benefits considerable weight.
24. However, whilst the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) supports economic growth and productivity, it also supports development that is sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, and is made safe for its lifetime with regard to flooding. I have found that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and would not be appropriate in terms of flood risk. This harm would be long lasting and would be contrary to the design and flood risk aims of the Framework. I ascribe this matter substantial weight. The benefits of the proposal, in this instance, do not therefore outweigh the harm that I have identified.

Conclusion

25. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and 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.

P Terceiro

INSPECTOR