



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 March 2019

by Gary Deane BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15th April 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/U2370/W/18/3210872

Fox Fields, Stalmine-with-Staynall FY6 0QR

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Clegg against the decision of Wyre Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 17/00709/OUT, dated 28 July 2017, was refused by notice dated 31 August 2018.
 - The development proposed is the erection of up to 4No dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. The application is in outline form with only access to be determined at this stage. The illustrative plans show 4 detached 2-storey dwellings each with an access off the adjacent private lane, which is called Fox Fields. I have taken these plans into account only insofar as they are relevant to my consideration of the principle of residential development on the site and access to it.
3. On 28 February 2019, the Council adopted the Wyre Local Plan (2011-2031) (LP), which replaced the saved policies of the Wyre Borough Plan 1999, to which the Council's reason for refusal and the evidence refers. The main parties have had the opportunity to submit comments in relation to the LP although none have been received.
4. On 19 February 2019, the Government published its Housing Delivery Test (HDT) results alongside an updated revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The HDT outcome for the Council indicates that the delivery has been above the requirement over the last 3 years. The matter of the Council's 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites appears not to be an issue between the main parties following the adoption of the LP. There is no change to the housing position as a result.
5. The revisions to the Framework do not otherwise materially alter the national policy approach in respect of the issues raised in this appeal and therefore the main parties have not been prejudiced by the updates to this document.
6. On 28 January 2019, The Planning Inspectorate confirmed that the proposal would not be of a scale and nature likely to result in a significant environmental impact and so an Environmental Impact Assessment was not required.

Main issue

7. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the local area.

Reasons

8. The site is part of a larger open field beyond the defined settlement limits of Stalmine and within the countryside as defined in the LP. Paragraph 170 of the Framework states that planning decisions should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. LP Policy SP4 echoes this approach. It also lists the types of development that would be acceptable in the countryside areas, none of which would apply in this case. The appeal scheme is, therefore, contrary to LP Policy SP4.
9. Although the site is close to existing housing to one side, which is referred to as 1-4 Fox Fields, and there is a static caravan park on the opposite side of the adjacent private road, the appellant's opinion that the new development would be a logical extension of the main built up area is overstated. In views from the adjacent private road on the immediate approach to the site, buildings are evident. However, there are more open views across the site and the nearby caravan park has a relatively low profile and is largely screened by vegetation. Although existing buildings are clearly legible as built form, their presence is modest in the context of the site and the surrounding views of it. Despite the hedgerow along the highway frontage of the site, and trees mainly around its perimeter, there is a very strong degree of visual inter-connectivity between the site and the open rural landscape further to the northwest and northeast.
10. In that context, the proposed development would obtrude into this open field, palpably extending the built form of the settlement into the open land. It would transform its character from a pleasant area of open undeveloped green space to one occupied by new built form where people would live and visit. The obtrusion would be most felt in views from the adjacent private road. From this vantage point, the sense of urbanisation would be evident because the landscape setting of the settlement would be eroded by the proposal. The expansive view across the fields from the private road would also be curtailed even with existing housing visible to one side. Although the roadside hedgerow, which is to be replanted or replaced, would provide some screening there would be at least one break within it for access that would allow views into and across the site. For these reasons, I am unable to share the appellant's view that the visual impact of the proposal would be next to none.
11. It is also very likely that the proposal would be apparent from the property notated as 1 Fox Fields on the plans. In these views, the appeal scheme would draw the eye because it would introduce new built form into an open field that, at present, adds to the spacious feel and semi-rural character of the local area. With its open grassed area and hedgerows, the site currently blends almost seamlessly into the rural landscape beyond. These aspects of the site partly encompass the characteristics of the local area as it is experienced and appreciated from 1 Fox Fields. From this direction, the proposal would appear as a visually disruptive and unwelcome addition to the local area.
12. For all of these reasons, the subtle balance of this interface between settlement and landscape would be lost, to the significant and material detriment of the scenic qualities and the intrinsic character of the local area. The appearance,

scale, layout and landscaping of the proposal could, to some extent, mitigate the visual impact of the development. These are matters reserved for subsequent approval. However, it is very likely that the new built form would still be clearly visible from the adjacent private road notwithstanding its detailed design.

13. On the main issue, I therefore conclude that the proposed development would materially harm the character and appearance of the local area, in conflict with LP Policies SP1, SP2 and SP4. These policies broadly aim to ensure that development protects the countryside and respects the character of the area. It would also be at odds with the Framework, which notes that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural environment.
14. I acknowledge that Stalmine is identified as a main rural settlement in the LP and is a recipient of some growth. The strategy of the LP is, however, to direct new development primarily to land within the settlement boundary. I accept that there is a range of local services and facilities in Stalmine, some of which are within walking or cycling distance of the site. There are also bus stops within convenient reach of the site for walkers and cyclists. Consequently, future occupiers would be reasonably well connected to local facilities and bus services without undue reliance on the private car. It does not necessarily follow, however, that the site is therefore a sustainable location as the appellant suggests since the economic, social and environmental consequences of development should also be taken into account.
15. The development would contribute to the local economy in the construction phase through the sale of local goods and by creating or safeguarding jobs. Future residents would pay tax, use local services and spend money in the local economy that in turn would sustain the vitality of the settlement. The appeal scheme would also add to the choice and number of houses, which is a social benefit. All of these considerations weigh in support of the proposal. I note that the Highway Authority and the Council both find the access arrangements to serve the proposal acceptable, with which I have no reason to disagree. However, sustainability also has an environmental objective and the Framework is to be read as a whole. Given my findings on the main issue, the balance of national policy does not support the appellant's case. To my mind, the public benefits of the proposed development are limited and do not outweigh the significant harm that I have identified.
16. Reference is made to recent appeal decisions in the Borough all of which predate the adoption of the LP. Consequently, the policy context differs to the proposal before me, as does their scale and location. Therefore I attach limited weight to these decisions in support of the appeal.
17. Interested parties raise several additional objections to the proposal including wildlife, privacy, highway safety, trees, hedgerows, a heritage asset, a public right of way, air pollution, precedent, light, noise and potential disturbance especially during construction. These are all important matters and I have taken into account all of the submitted evidence, which includes a petition against the scheme. However, given my findings in relation to the main issue, these are not matters on which my decision has turned.
18. The appellant is critical of the Council's handling of the application and the delay in reaching a decision. During the time taken to consider and determine the application, planning policy at both the national and local levels was revised

and updated. However, my remit is solely to decide this appeal, which takes into account the planning policies that apply at that time.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Gary Deane

INSPECTOR