



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 September 2024

by K Ford MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 October 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/24/3347215

Land adjacent to Hurstons Lane, Alton, Staffordshire ST10 4AP

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Tellwright against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
 - The application Ref SMD/2024/0109, dated 3 March 2024, was refused by notice dated 29 April 2024.
 - The development proposed is erection of detached bungalow.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - Whether the site is an appropriate location for development having regard to the spatial strategy of the development plan.
 - The effect on the character and appearance of the area including the setting of the Alton and Farley Conservation Area.

Reasons

Location of Development

3. The appeal site is part of a field near to the junction of Back Lane and Hurstons Lane and is occupied by 2 pigeon loft buildings screened by mature roadside hedgerow. The site is surrounded by open fields on all sides except to the north west where there is residential development. The site is located adjacent to but outside the settlement boundary of Alton and as such is in the countryside.
4. Policy H1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan resists new market housing outside the development boundaries of towns and large villages. The policy includes a number of exceptions where development is permitted. There is dispute between the parties as to whether both of the existing buildings on site are permanent structures and therefore whether the site constitutes previously developed land and is a permitted exception. Even if the site were to be considered previously developed land, Policy H1 requires all new housing development to be compatible with the character of the surrounding area, a matter to which I now turn.

Character and Appearance

5. The site has a rural character and appearance, being surrounded by fields on most sides. Hurstons Lane separates the site and rural area from the built development contained within the village boundary.
6. It is agreed between the parties that the existing structures on the site are not attractive. However, their small scale and design means that they do not dominate the field or alter the overriding rural character of the site.
7. The proposal, although low lying and constructed of materials not dissimilar to the wider vernacular, would introduce a domestic residential dwelling where such development is currently absent. Whilst in a similar location, the development would form a larger footprint than the existing structures on the site. Despite design attempts to mimic an agricultural building such as simple elevation and high level windows, the site would be domesticated by the boundary treatments, hardstanding for parking and the domestic paraphernalia that can be expected to accompany the development such as outdoor seating, washing line and outdoor play equipment. The domestication of the site would occur even if the area of amenity space proposed was reduced in size, as suggested by the appellant. The development would create a suburban appearance in what is currently a rural setting.
8. The site is located adjacent to but outside the Alton and Farley Conservation Area, the significance of which includes the back lanes that serve the long rear gardens of building plots as part of a medieval planned settlement. Residential development is not a feature of the side of Back Lane where the appeal site is located.
9. Whilst some of the proposed development would be screened from public view, the overall scheme would harm the character and appearance of the area and the Conservation Area. As the harm to the Conservation Area would be localised the proposal (using the terminology contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)) would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the Conservation Area as a designated heritage asset. Nevertheless, this harm is of considerable importance and weight. The harm is such that the development would conflict with the part of Policy DC1 of the Local Plan which supports development that reinforces local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of an area.
10. It would also conflict with Policy DC2 of the Local Plan. Amongst other things the policy requires heritage assets, including their setting to be conserved and where possible enhanced in a manner appropriate to their significance. Development proposals are also required to contribute positively to the character of the historic environment. It would also conflict with the part of Policy SS11 of the Local Plan which requires new development in the Churnet Valley to be of a scale and nature that conserves and enhances the heritage of the area.
11. The development would also conflict with the relevant parts of Policies H1, SS10, DC1 and DC3 of the Local Plan. These policies restrict development that can be located within the countryside and prevents development that would lead to a prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse

impact on the character and appearance of the countryside or the setting of a settlement.

12. It is necessary, given the harm identified amounts to less than substantial, that it should be weighed against the benefits of the proposal.

Planning Balance

13. The NPPF requires that less than substantial harm is weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. There would be economic and social benefits generated by the development and the scheme would increase housing supply in the area. However, given the very small scale of the development I attribute moderate weight to these benefits. Against this I have found significant harm to the character and appearance of the area and as such the site is not an appropriate location for the development proposed. The less than substantial harm to heritage assets should be afforded great weight. I do not find that the benefits of the proposal amount to public benefits that outweigh the harm that would be caused to the significance of the Conservation Area.

Conclusion

14. The development would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no other material considerations of sufficient weight to indicate a decision other than in accordance with the development plan. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

K Ford

INSPECTOR