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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 January 2014

**by Ava Wood Dip Arch MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**

**Decision date: 13 February 2014**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/L2630/A/13/2196746**

**Site adjacent school, Flaxlands Road, Carleton Rode, Norfolk NR16 1RL**

- 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 Peter and Andrew Jackson against the decision of South Norfolk District Council.
  - The application Ref:2012/0863/F, dated 27 April 2012, was refused by notice dated 22 October 2012.
  - The development proposed is proposed residential development on land adjacent to Carleton Rode Primary School.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Preliminary Matters

2. Following the site visit, comments were invited from the local planning authority and third parties in the light of additional representations submitted on behalf of the appellants. I agreed to accept the additional information, as it purported to provide an updated position on the Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk (JCS).
3. Although the appellants' agent forwarded a note in respect of his interpretation of the housing supply situation discussed in the report by the Inspector examining the soundness of the JCS, there was not an update with the note on the status of the JCS. A further request from the Planning Inspectorate along those lines to the main parties elicited the information and copies of the adopted JCS Policy 2 and Policy 15 were forwarded to me.
4. To avoid any misunderstanding, it must be stressed that I was not party to any discussion on site with regard to the extent of new material to be submitted. The discussion referred to in the appellant's letter of 20 January 2014 proceeded after my departure from the site and was between Mr Belton (representing the appellants) and the South Norfolk Council officer attending the site visit. Furthermore, I have taken account of all additional written submissions in reaching my decision.

### Main Issues

5. These are:

- Whether there is sufficient justification for allowing development in the countryside.
- The effect the proposal would have on the character and appearance of the area and on the settings of nearby listed buildings.
- Whether the development would lead to unsafe highway conditions.

## **Reasons**

### ***First Main Issue***

6. In addition to the JCS referred to above, the development plan also comprises the saved policies of the South Norfolk Local Plan (SNLP) adopted in 2003. SNLP Policy ENV8 limits developments outside Village Boundaries to those specifically listed in the policy. A residential development of 11 new homes falls outside the remit of the policy. The proposal is therefore contrary to the policy and its aim of maintaining the landscape setting of settlements and the predominant rural character of the Plan area.
7. The appellant's evidence questions whether this policy is up to date, given the Council's housing supply position. It is indeed a restrictive policy but more relevant to delineating the countryside and protecting its character than relating to housing supply itself. The policy intent remains consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) planning principle of recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and I have accorded it the weight described in paragraph 215 of the NPPF.
8. The NPPF additionally calls for supporting thriving rural communities within the countryside. To that end, Carleton Rode is identified as one of a number of Service Villages in JCS Policy 15, and where (along with other Service Villages) land will be allocated for small-scale housing growth in the range of 10–20 dwellings, subject to form and character considerations. The policy accepts that the settlement limits of Carleton Rode would need to be redefined. This process is being taken forward through the emerging Local Plan Site Specific Preferred Site Allocation and Development Boundaries. To date, the appeal site has not been allocated as a potential contributor to the 15 or so residual dwellings expected to be delivered in the village, as other more suitable options can be identified. The merits or otherwise of the options selected are not for me to question.
9. The NPPF also looks to boost significantly the supply of housing. The Core Strategy Inspector may have identified a shortfall in the Norwich Policy Area but from the evidence it is apparent that within the South Norfolk Rural Policy Area the 5 year supply targets are being exceeded. The present circumstances of a favourable position in the rural housing supply do not point to anything other than the controlled growth anticipated in Service Villages under JCS Policy 15, as set out in the recently adopted Plan. The appeal site therefore remains a countryside location and subject to the restrictions of SNLP Policy ENV8. The proposal conflicts with it and current circumstances do not warrant a departure from the policy or its objectives.

### ***Second Main Issue***

10. The appeal site is part of a larger area of agricultural land to the southwest of Flaxlands Road and on the western side of the smaller of the two discrete built-

up parts of the village. The focal point in this section of Carleton Rode is the Grade I listed Parish Church of All Saints. The Church, its listed wall and the Grade II listed Church Farmhouse, Rectory and timber-framed cottages form an important historic grouping on the north eastern side of Flaxlands Road.

11. Surrounded as it is now by development, the link between the Church and the countryside is largely confined to views from the churchyard across the appeal site and of the Church from the footpath running alongside the site's eastern boundary. The same applies to Church Farmhouse which is physically detached from open countryside but overlooks the appeal site towards open fields. Much of the rural setting that would have once defined this collection of historic buildings has been eroded by incremental encroachment by pockets of modern developments, generally comprising individual houses of little architectural merit.
12. The design for the appeal scheme by contrast exhibits a refreshingly modern approach to house design. The form and detailing are drawn from traditional Norfolk buildings but assembled in a pleasing coherent composition without resorting to pastiche. The layout has its shortcomings, such as bin stores and parking spaces dominating the entrance to the site. But on the whole it would represent a well-considered scheme with a pleasant, spacious feel to it. The contrast with the existing linear spread of buildings on Flaxlands Road and Chapel Road would be marked. However, the scheme would create its own distinctive, high quality environment.
13. That said, the proposal would also extend built development into an area of land that is currently undeveloped and forms part of the open countryside marking the remnant of an historic relationship that the Church and Church Farmhouse would have benefitted from (albeit now diminished). That link would be completely severed and views to and from the countryside of the listed buildings would be disrupted by the development. The proposal would be to the detriment of the setting in particular of the Church and Church Farmhouse. On top of that, the inevitable urbanisation of the site's frontage along with the group of new buildings and attendant domestic paraphernalia would represent an intrusive and harmful addition to the rural character of this part of Carleton Rode, notwithstanding the intrinsic merits of the scheme's design.
14. The impact on the listed buildings' settings and therefore harm to their significance would be less than substantial. In such circumstances the NPPF advises weighing this harm against the public benefits of the proposal. The benefit of good design would be outweighed by the intrusive effects of developing this area of open land. Provision of affordable homes would amount to a public benefit but the evidence shows that the need for such homes could be accommodated elsewhere in the village.
15. In summary then, although I find the proposed scheme in itself represents good design, development on the site would cause harm to the area's rural character and harmfully impose on the settings of listed buildings. The proposal would fall short of respecting landscape character and historic environment, and therefore fails against JCS Policy 2.

### **Third Main Issue**

16. The narrow winding highway network approaching the village and running through it are a feature of this part of rural Norfolk. The unsuitability of the road network to accommodate growth at Carleton Rode in the terms expected in JCS Policy 15 would apply to any other site in the village as much as to this one. If anything, the provision of additional passing places along the southern approach to the village is a positive feature of the appeal scheme and would relieve some of the pressure on this road. Furthermore, the appeal site is likely to be no less accessible to services and facilities than any other location in Carleton Roding and cannot therefore be discounted in terms of its likely high reliance on private vehicles.
17. However, the scope for conflict and congestion arising from proximity to the adjacent Carleton Rode Primary School adds to the development's unacceptability. The narrowness and poor alignment of Flaxlands Road combined with lack of pedestrian provision adds to problems likely to be encountered during school pick up and drop off times. Photographic and written evidence demonstrates the difficulties already experienced in the area with vehicles parked on the sides of the road. Any additional school parking spaces offered with the proposed scheme would be welcome but would not be sufficient to overcome the well-grounded concerns about the additional traffic generated by 11 new dwellings in what is already an unsatisfactory situation.
18. The circumstances described would lead to conflict with SNLP Policy IMP8 which seeks the safe and free flow of traffic.

### **Other Matters and Conclusions**

19. The new development would clearly disrupt the open views currently enjoyed by the occupants of the Old Schoolhouse. However, because of the distance of the nearest new dwelling from the existing property's boundaries, there is no question of their outlook being affected by an overbearing development or overshadowing. The loss of a personal view in itself does not justify dismissal of the appeal.
20. I conclude that the proposed development would conflict with the development plan on the basis of its location in the countryside and for the harm caused to the character of the area and to heritage interests. Given this environmental harm, and notwithstanding my observations on the accessibility of the site, it follows that the proposal would not amount to sustainable development in the way described in the NPPF.
21. I find nothing in other matters raised to alter the balance of my considerations or the decision to dismiss the appeal.

*Ava Wood*  
Inspector