



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 March 2019

by Rachel Walmsley BSc MSc MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 02 April 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/18/3209699

Land at Oakington Road, Cottenham CB24 8TW

- 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 Gabriel Lau against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref S/4548/17/OL, dated 20 December 2017 was refused by notice dated 31 May 2018.
 - The development proposed is the erection of up to 23 residential units, including affordable housing provision, public open space and associated access, infrastructure and landscaping. All matters reserved except for access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. The application was submitted for outline planning permission with matters other than access reserved. I have dealt with the appeal on this basis, treating all plans, other than the proposed access arrangements, as illustrative.
3. Since the appeal was lodged, the Council have adopted a new Local Plan¹. As this is the plan that is in place at the time of my decision, I have had regard to its policies.
4. A revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework)² has been published since the appeal was lodged. Both main parties were given the opportunity to comment on any relevant implications for the appeal. I have had regard to the Framework and any comments received in reaching my decision.

Main Issues

5. These are:
 - i) the effect of the proposal on the character of the local landscape; and,
 - ii) whether the proposed development would provide satisfactory access to shops and services with particular regard to the availability of sustainable transport modes.

¹ South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, adopted September 2018

² National Planning Policy Framework, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (July 2018)

Reasons

Local landscape character

6. The appeal site lies outside the settlement of Cottenham. The site is flat, undistinguished in character and unmanaged and therefore of limited landscape quality. Nonetheless, the site sits within an open rural landscape which is within the Cambridgeshire Claylands National Landscape Character Area. The area's prevailing characteristics are land that is gently undulating, open and arable, formed of planned and regular shaped fields. The appeal site, being flat and open in character, contributes positively to the character of this landscape.
7. Opposite the appeal site, on the other side of Oakington Road is land designated as Green Belt to prevent the coalescence of settlements. The open character of the appeal site reinforces the sense of openness that characterises the Green Belt.
8. The site is also within the Fen Edge landscape character area which, in addition to being low lying and open, is characterised by villages that sit low in the landscape and are screened by vegetation. The Village Design Statement³ identifies Cottenham as being a contained settlement defined by trees and points to formal lines of poplars being distinctive features on the western approaches to the village. The appeal site is some distance from the edge of the settlement but a line of poplars stand prominently within the landscape and within proximity of the site.
9. Developing the site would create a notable change in the character of the site from rural and open countryside to built-up and urban. Together with the prominent position of the development away from other built forms, the housing would detract from the open and rural setting of the site and appear therefore as an encroachment into the countryside. This would be the incremental form of development that the District Design Guide⁴ seeks to avoid.
10. Whilst the plans before me are illustrative, the development is promoted on the premise that two sides of the site would be enclosed by a buffer of landscaping. This would mimic the screening at the edge of the village and help lessen the visual impact of the development within views. Indeed the Council's Landscape Officer raised no objection to the development in landscape terms, subject to certain conditions being imposed. However, given the distance of the site from the settlement the landscaping would do little to overcome the harm that would result from the physical separation of the development from the village and therefore its encroachment into the countryside.
11. Also suggested is tree planting along Oakington Road. Whilst this would help to continue and reinforce the existing line of landscaping alongside the road, it is unlikely that the trees would reach a height or level of maturity to screen the proposed housing effectively. Together with the movement of people and vehicles associated with the access onto Oakington Road, the development's separateness from the village would be reinforced.

³ Cottenham Village Design Statement, Supplementary Planning Document (adopted November 2007)

⁴ District Design Guide: High Quality and Sustainable Development in South Cambridgeshire, Supplementary Planning Document (adopted March 2010)

12. There are a number of planning permissions for housing development between the appeal site and Cottenham. These applications were decided when the Council could not demonstrate a five-year supply of housing and therefore they do are not directly comparable with the appeal proposal. Also, notwithstanding a reserved matters application, there is nothing before me which provides the assurance that the permissions will be implemented. As such, they do not help to justify the development proposed from the point of these applications providing the built development that the development would be a continuation of.
13. I concur with the appellant that as the site is outside of the Green Belt it is not subject to any Green Belt tests of appropriateness and openness. However, policy NH/8 seeks to ensure that development on the edge of settlements and surrounded by Green Belt includes *careful landscaping and design measures of a high quality*. The development would be surrounded by landscaping which would help mitigate the visual impact of the development and therefore is nothing before me to suggest that the development would be of poor design quality. Furthermore, being on the opposite side of the road to and therefore a distance from the Green Belt, the development would not detract from the open setting of the Green Belt.
14. Nonetheless, policies HQ/1 and NH/2 of the Local Plan seek to ensure that development is of a high design quality and respects, retains or enhances the local character and distinctiveness of the local landscape and of the National Character Area in which it is located. For the reasons given the development would be harmful to the local landscape character and therefore contrary to policies HQ/1 and NH/2 of the Local Plan.

Access to services and facilities

15. Policy TI/2 of the Local Plan seeks development in locations that reduce the need to travel and promote sustainable travel appropriate to its location. The policy continues by setting out the measures expected to achieve this, including safe, short and direct walking and cycling routes and for developments of the size proposed, a Travel Plan.
16. The appellant refers to two kilometres as the maximum benchmark for an acceptable walking distance. Since this benchmark was set, a more widely recognised distance is up to 800 metres as set out in *Manual for Streets*⁵ and the District Design Guide, although there is not a strict upper limit to this distance.
17. The development is supported by a proposal to construct a footpath to link the site with a footpath within Cottenham. Prospective occupiers would therefore be able to walk into the village. However, whilst the edge of the village may be within the recommended walking distance of 800 metres, the services and facilities such as shops, post office and library that would meet people's daily needs would not be. The nearest local store would be over 800 metres from the site and most of the services and facilities that occupiers would look to use are on the High Street which would be over 1000 metres from the site. The college and sports centre are within a more reasonable walking distance but these are not facilities that would meet daily needs.

⁵ Department for Transport (2007) *Manual for Streets*

18. Whilst 1000 metres is not an excessive distance to walk, it is onerous when carrying shopping. In addition, Oakington Road is a busy thoroughfare with vehicles travelling at speeds of over 50mph and up to the national speed limit of 60mph. This is not a pleasant walking environment that would encourage people to walk, particularly younger people walking to school or college. It is far more likely that parents and pedestrians would opt to drive the short distance into the village.
19. The appellant suggests that cycling would be an alternative mode of travel. Whilst cycle parking spaces and adult cycle training are proposed, there would be no safe cycle route into the village. Oakington Road, being restricted to two lanes and supporting fast moving traffic is not conducive to cycling.
20. There would be a bus stop within reasonable walking distance of the site. A regular service would take prospective occupiers to other settlements, notably Cambridge which offers a diverse range of services and facilities. Given the time taken to travel there by bus, prospective occupiers are unlikely to use this service on a regular basis to meet their daily needs. Nonetheless, it does offer a means to travel other than by car.
21. The Travel Plan before me suggests a range of incentives to encourage prospective occupiers to travel other than by car. Whilst the incentives appear to maximise the opportunities available for the site's location, I have found that walking and cycling are unlikely modes of travel. The Travel Plan then becomes much less effectual.
22. I recognise that there is generally a greater reliance on the private car in more remote rural areas. However, it remains that there would be a lack of sustainable transport choices available to enable future residents to conveniently access services and facilities. As such the proposal would be a functionally isolated development in the countryside due to its distance from everyday services and facilities. This would leave future occupants largely reliant on private vehicles with limited travel choices. The development would also undermine the Framework's aim of locating new dwellings in rural areas close to services and facilities as a means of reducing unnecessary travel by car, with its associated carbon emissions, as one measure to cumulatively limit the effects of climate change.
23. My overall finding, therefore, is that the appeal site is functionally isolated and as a result the development would not provide satisfactory access to shops and services with particular regard to the availability of sustainable transport modes. As such, the proposal would be contrary to policy TI/2 of the Local Plan.

Other matters

24. The planning application was recommended to committee for approval. However, this was when the Council could not demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. Notwithstanding this change in circumstances, a recommendation to committee is just that with Members able to decide the application based on the Officer's recommendation and all other material factors.
25. The appellant suggests that the site benefits from the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out in the Framework. The Inspector's report examining the Local Plan concluded that subject to the Main Modifications, the

plan will provide for a five-year housing land supply and the housing requirement will therefore be met. During the course of the appeal the Main Modifications were made and the Local Plan adopted. In light of this and paragraph 74 of the Framework which points to a recently made local plan being sufficient evidence of a five-year housing land supply, I am satisfied that the Council can demonstrate a five-year housing land supply and therefore the proposal does not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development. I recognise that the position on housing land supply and the provision of affordable housing in South Cambridgeshire may change in the near future but I have no evidence that this is currently the case. This does not, therefore, dissuade me from my conclusions on the Council's position on a five-year housing land supply.

26. The development would realise social and economic benefits, not least helping to satisfy an identified need for affordable housing, providing jobs during construction and supporting the local economy over the lifetime of the development.

Balancing and Conclusion

27. The development would have a harmful effect on local landscape character and would not provide satisfactory access to shops and services with particular regard to the availability of sustainable transport modes. The moderate weight given to the benefits identified do not lead me to determine the appeal other than in accordance with the development plan. I have taken account of all other matters raised, but none changes this conclusion. The proposal would not, therefore, be sustainable development and as a result the appeal is dismissed.

R Walmsley

INSPECTOR