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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 July 2019

**by Jonathan Edwards BSc(Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 22 August 2019**

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### **Appeal Ref: APP/Z2830/W/19/3228485**

### **Land adjoining Orchard House, Crowfield Road, Crowfield NN13 5TW**

- 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 Beaumont against the decision of South Northamptonshire Council.
  - The application Ref S/2018/2143/OUT, dated 29 August 2018, was refused by notice dated 16 November 2018.
  - The development proposed is 2no. dwellings with parking and amenity space to include a turning head, which is to be completed to an adoptable standard.
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### **Decision**

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### **Procedural Matters**

2. The application was submitted in outline with all matters reserved. However, a Proposed Site Plan has been provided showing details of layout and access for the proposed development. The drawing is described as illustrative in the appellant's appeal statement and so I have considered it on this basis.
3. The address of the appeal site in the banner above is taken from the appeal form rather than the application form as it more accurately describes the location of the appeal site.
4. Since the Council's decision, the emerging South Northamptonshire Part 2 Local Plan Draft Plan 2018 (SNLP Part 2) has formally been submitted for examination which has been completed. Proposed modifications to the SNLP Part 2 have been published. Whilst not yet part of the development plan, the SNLP Part 2 is well-advanced in its preparation and the policies provided are generally consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework) in terms of promoting sustainable development. However, I have not been informed whether there are unresolved objections to relevant policies or that the Examiner has found the SNLP Part 2 to be sound. Therefore, having regard to the provisions of paragraph 48 of The Framework, I afford the SNLP Part 2 moderate weight in the assessment of this appeal. The appellant has been given an opportunity to respond to the Council's submissions in terms of the SNLP Part 2 policies in relation to the appeal proposal.
5. The Framework was revised on 19 February 2019 and this post-dates the Council's refusal notice. I have considered the Framework as part of the determination of this appeal.

## **Main Issues**

6. The main issues are (i) whether the proposed development would provide a suitable location for housing having regard to local and national policies and accessibility to services, and (ii) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

## **Reasons**

### *Suitability of the location*

7. Whilst the appellant questions its relevance to the current settlement pattern, both main parties accept that the appeal site is located outside the Village Confines Boundary (VCB) for Crowfield as defined in the South Northamptonshire Local Plan 1997 (SNLP). As such, under the terms of SNLP policy, the site falls in open countryside where development is generally resisted unless one of the exceptions as set out in SNLP policies EV2 and H6 applies. The proposal is not one of the listed exceptions and so would be contrary to these policies.
8. Policy S1 of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) 2014 (WNJCS) limits new development in rural areas with an emphasis on, amongst other things, enhancing and maintaining the vitality of rural communities, shortening journeys and facilitating access to jobs. Policy R1 of the WNJCS resists residential development outside village confines, although permits development in exceptional circumstances if it would enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Emerging policy SS1 of the SNLP Part 2 defines the whole of Crowfield as open countryside and directs new development towards the most sustainable locations. Under SNLP Part 2 policy LH4, single dwellings in open countryside are only considered acceptable in specified circumstances, none of which apply in this case.
9. The introduction of only 2 dwellings is unlikely to have any meaningful effect on the vitality of Crowfield, particularly as it includes no shop, business or community facilities. Syresham contains some services, but these are limited and a lack of convenient attractive links would be a significant deterrent to walking and cycling from the proposed dwellings to these facilities. Instead, residents of the proposal are more likely to travel by car to Syresham or to the broader range of facilities at larger service centres such as Brackley. Consequently, the proposed development would not be located to minimise the need to travel, would not allow easy access to services and would not significantly enhance or maintain the vitality of a rural community. As such the proposal would be contrary to WNJCS policies S1 and R1 as well as emerging policies SS1 and LH4 of the SNLP Part 2.
10. Use of the internet can reduce the need to travel and I note the plans for faster broadband in Crowfield. However, it is likely that the residents of the proposed dwellings would want to gain access to services such as schools, doctors and other community facilities and home working could not be assured. Also, the provision of electric vehicle charging points would not shorten journeys or facilitate access to jobs. As such these factors fail to override the concerns set out above in respect of the location of the proposed development and accessibility to services.

11. For the reasons outlined above, I conclude that the proposed development would not provide a suitable location for housing having regard to local and national policies and accessibility to services. Consequently, and in this regard, it would be contrary to saved policies EV2 and H6 of the SNLP, policies S1 and R1 of the WNJCS, policies SS1 and LH4 of the emerging SNLP Part 2 and the Framework which aim to locate rural housing development where it would support existing communities and would limit the need to travel.

#### *Character and appearance*

12. The appeal site lies in the corner of an open field, adjacent to Orchard House on the edge of the village. Crowfield contains a single road with housing of various styles and ages on both sides and gaps between buildings that provide views of the field network that surrounds the village. Whilst not the subject of any special landscape protection, the appeal site forms part of this field network which significantly contributes to the rural setting and character of the village.
13. The proposed introduction of dwellings would result in a marked loss of the appeal site's openness and would represent a conspicuous encroachment into the field network surrounding the village. The proposed development would be particularly noticeable when approaching along the footpath from the B4525, up the slope of the field and immediately adjacent to the appeal site. Whilst landscape screening could be provided along the boundaries, this would take time to mature and is unlikely to be of a height or depth that would completely screen the houses. Furthermore, any boundary treatment would be close to the public right of way and with the proposed houses would obstruct existing views towards the village. The loss of openness and outlook would be detrimental to the attractive approach to Crowfield, regardless as to the level of the use of the footpath.
14. Whilst Orchard House is largely screened by a tree belt, housing on the opposite side of the road can be seen over hedgerows from the footpath. As such, the proposed houses would be seen with other buildings in the village as well as the open fields. However, by reason of its position on the opposite side of the road, the proposed development would be more prominent and intrusive compared to existing buildings when approaching the village along the footpath from the B4525.
15. The proposed turning head would require the removal of the existing field hedgerow that by reason of its height and prominent roadside location contributes positively to the rural character of the village. Being on the boundary of the proposed turning head and houses, any replacement hedging is likely to be more domestic in appearance and so fail to contribute as positively to the rural character of the village.
16. The combination of harmful effects described above would significantly undermine the appeal site's contribution to the rural character of the village and its setting. I note the houses opposite the appeal site result in the extent of the village being longer on the other side of the road. However, any benefit in terms of rounding off the village and providing a visual end stop would not address or override my concerns with the appeal development's effect on the character and appearance of the area.

17. For the reasons outlined above, I conclude the development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, and in this regard, it would not accord with saved policies G3, EV1 and EV21 of the SNLP, policies S10, H1 and R1 of the WNJCS, policies SS2 and NE4 of the emerging SNLP Part 2 and the Framework which aim, amongst other things, to protect or enhance the character and appearance of the area and to provide attractive environments.

### **Other matters**

18. Reference has been made to housing development allowed on the opposite side of the road. However, this scheme would appear to more closely follow Policy H5 of the SNLP that allows infill development in Crowfield. This appeal development would be entirely outside the VCB and therefore is different to that scheme.
19. The road through the village is narrow and the proposed turning area would generally make it easier for vehicles that do not have access to private land to turn around. However, most properties in Crowfield have vehicular access and off-road parking areas that already allow vehicles to turn. As such, whilst the proposal attracts positive consideration in terms of enabling easier on-road traffic movement, I attach only limited weight to this benefit.
20. The proposal would contribute to the supply of housing, providing new energy and water efficient dwellings. However, any benefits of the scheme in these regards would be modest, given the proposed development is for only 2 dwellings and the undisputed position of the Council that there is in excess of 11 years supply of housing land.
21. In addition to the above suggested benefits, I have noted the other points made by the appellant in support of the appeal scheme. However, these do not either singly or in combination, lead me away from my overall conclusion.
22. Overall, the benefits of the proposal are modest and insufficient to outweigh the significant harm to the character and appearance of the area and the unsuitable location for the appeal proposal when having regard to the development plan policies and accessibility to services.

### **Conclusion**

23. For the reasons given above, and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

*Jonathan Edwards*

INSPECTOR