



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 July 2014

by Colin Cresswell BSc (Hons) MA MBA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 28 July 2014

Appeal Ref: APP/R3325/A/14/2217120

Land between Venn Farm and Fosseway Farm, Stoke Road, Martock, Somerset TA12 6AQ.

- 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 Mrs Sarah Dike against the decision of South Somerset District Council.
 - The application Ref 13/04764/OUT, dated 16 January 2014, was refused by notice dated 12 March 2014.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 1no detached dwellinghouse.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The application was made in outline, with all details except access reserved for future determination. I have determined the appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposal would be consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

Reasons

4. Policy ST5 of the *South Somerset Local Plan Adopted 2006* (the Local Plan) indicates, in criterion 1, that development should promote a pattern of land use that reduces the need to travel, minimises the length of journeys and provides choice of transport options. This is broadly consistent with a core principle of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (the Framework) to actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling. To promote sustainable development, Paragraph 55 of the Framework makes it clear that new isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided unless special circumstances apply.
5. Although the appeal site is situated between two existing dwellings, it is not part of an established rural settlement and the surrounding area is mostly agricultural in nature. It is therefore in a relatively isolated location. Nonetheless, the appellant argues that future occupiers of the proposed dwelling could access local services in Stoke Sub Hamdon and Martock by means other than private vehicle. Although relatively few details are provided, I understand that these settlements contain a range of shops and services capable of meeting many everyday needs, including schools.

6. According to the appellant, the pedestrian route to local services within Stoke Sub Hamdon and Martock is 1.4 kilometres and 1.7 kilometres respectively. Whilst this may be a relatively short drive, it is likely to be beyond convenient walking distance for many potential occupiers of the proposed dwelling. Furthermore, this part of Stoke Road contains fast moving traffic and is mostly unlit, with large sections having no paved footway. As such, the route may be perceived as unsafe by lone persons or schoolchildren, especially during winter when daylight is limited during working hours. For similar reasons, it does not provide a particularly attractive route for potential cyclists.
7. Apart from nearby settlements, there is also a garage incorporating a convenience store approximately 800 metres from the appeal site. However, the pedestrian route indicated by the appellant would involve walking along Stoke Road and crossing an unlit footbridge which passes over the A303. Even though the appellant may choose to walk the route, it is unlikely to be perceived as an attractive or safe option by all potential occupiers of the proposed dwelling especially during hours of darkness.
8. Information is provided showing an hourly bus service connecting Yeovil with Martock via Stoke Road. However, it is not clear how far the nearest bus stop is from the appeal site and, in any event, these services do not appear to run beyond late afternoon during weekdays. As such, these buses are unlikely to provide a convenient alternative to private vehicles for quick day-to-day journeys to local shops and services. Although the appellant refers to additional school services and on-demand buses running along Stoke Road, few details have been provided regarding the frequency of these services.
9. Overall, it seems likely that future occupiers of the proposed dwelling would be heavily reliant on private vehicle use to meet most of their day-to-day needs. Whilst there may be some potential to walk, cycle or catch buses to access local shops and services, these are not particularly convenient or attractive options in this particular location. Whilst private vehicle journeys to Martock or Stoke Sub Hampton may be relatively short in length, the need for making such journeys in the first place is likely to be frequent given the relatively isolated location of the appeal site outside established rural settlements where most local services are concentrated.
10. When the application was originally determined, the Council were unable to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply. Evidence has since been provided to show that this situation may have now changed. Nonetheless, even if there is not such a supply, I consider that the very limited contribution that a single dwelling would make towards addressing an undersupply of housing and improving the choice of homes would be minimal. Similarly, any benefits to the local economy that may arise through the construction process would not be particularly substantial.
11. As such, any benefit that the proposal may bring does not outweigh the environmental harm (in terms of carbon emissions) that would arise by developing in a relatively inaccessible location outside established settlements. Whilst it is argued that the dwelling would be highly energy efficient, this matter is reserved for future determination. Therefore, even though the landscape and ecological impact of the proposal would be minor, the proposal would not represent sustainable development for which the Framework states there is a presumption in favour.

12. In reaching this decision, I have had regard to the Appeal Decision¹ allowing a gypsy and traveller site near the appeal site. It is reported within this decision that the local authority consider the location to score well in sustainability terms, being within a reasonable distance of services and facilities. The appellant points out that it is more inaccessible than the appeal site. However, the assessment was made in the context of gypsy and traveller accommodation which is assessed under different policy criteria than general market housing. With regard to the appeal proposal, Paragraph 55 of the Framework makes it clear that isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided unless there are special circumstances. Little evidence has been put forward to indicate that any of the special circumstances outlined in the Framework would apply in this particular case.
13. I therefore conclude that the proposal would not be consistent with the principles of sustainable development. There would be conflict with Policy ST5 of the Local Plan which, amongst other things, aims to achieve sustainable land use patterns that reduce the need to travel by private vehicle. The proposal would also conflict with a core principle of the Framework to actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling. Furthermore, it would conflict with Paragraph 55 of the Framework which aims to avoid isolated homes in the countryside.
14. For the above reasons, and having regard to all other matters raised, I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Colin Cresswell

INSPECTOR

¹ Appeal Decision APP/R3325/A/10/2129616