
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 August 2013

by George Arrowsmith BA, MCD, MRTPI

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

Decision date: 24 September 2013

Appeal Ref: APP/J0540/A/13/2196127

Land to the rear of Firwood, First Drift, Wothorpe, Stamford. Lincolnshire, PE9 3JL

- 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 Kelland Developments against the decision of Peterborough City Council.
 - The application Ref 13/00087/FUL, dated 18 January 2013, was refused by notice dated 25 March 2013.
 - The development proposed is a detached house and replacement garage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposed development would be detrimental to the character of this part of Wothorpe and to that of the nearby open countryside.

Reasons

3. Wothorpe is an area of low density residential development set in mature grounds. As such it has a semi-rural character which shades easily into the open countryside surrounding the village. Because of its distinct character the village has been designated as a Special Character Area (SCA) in the Peterborough Site Allocations DPD. Policy SA19 in that document sets out specific criteria for assessing proposals for development in SCAs. The first of these criteria, which says that there should be no subdivision of gardens if this adversely affects the character of the area, is particularly relevant.
 4. The officer's report on the application describes the site and its surroundings as follows: *"Wothorpe is a village of two streets, First Drift and Second Drift. These two streets run parallel for part of their length, for a distance of about 250m as they run south-east from Kettering Road (the A43). This means that the area between the two roads is developed, with several backland and infill developments in previously very large gardens. However after about 250m Second Drift stops, which means that the south west side of First Drift has no backland development, rear gardens are generous and connect with the*
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landscape". I agree with this largely objective description. Firwood, a long narrow cottage set at 90 degrees to the frontage, is on the south west side of First Drift. Its rear garden borders open countryside which falls away to a shallow valley.

5. The Council's main objection to the appeal proposal is that it would result in a large house with big windows to the rear of nearby houses and elevated above the shallow valley to the south west. They consider that it would contrast with the existing character of this part of First Drift where there is no backland development and would be prominent and obtrusive when seen from the countryside to the south west, which is crossed by a public footpath. The officer's report says that the design of the proposed building, which in general terms echoes that of other recent developments on First Drift, is not bad in itself but is not right for its context. The Council's Conservation Team comment that, although only partial views of the building would be visible from First Drift, the creation of the new vehicular entrance would draw attention to the existence of backland development.
6. I turn first to the effect of the proposal on views of the settlement when seen from the surrounding countryside and, by association, on the character of the countryside itself. The new house would be seen from the public footpath which runs through the field to the south west of the site but from much of that footpath it would be screened by trees and a hedgerow closer to the observer. There is however one stretch of footpath from which the house would be clearly visible. When walking the footpath I saw glimpses of existing houses on First Drift although they were seen as part of a view that was dominated by trees. I particularly noted a very large new house known as Hexthorpe House just over 100m to the south east of Firwood. This extends almost as far to the south west of First Drift as would the proposed house. Views of this new house from the footpath are only partial because it is surrounded by trees, but it is still visible.
7. I do not know what considerations led the Council to grant planning permission for Hexthorpe House but it appears to have replaced a smaller house known as Drift End which occupied the same large grounds but stood further to the north east. As such its development would not have entailed the subdivision of a garden.
8. Apart from the fact that it does not appear to have resulted from the subdivision of a garden, the difference between the appeal proposal and Hexthorpe House is that the latter is set within an extensive curtilage surrounded by mature trees whereas the proposed house proposed would stand close to the south western boundary of its curtilage and be separated from the countryside beyond only by a 1.2m high post and rail fence. I am therefore satisfied that it would have a greater impact on the appearance on the edge of the settlement. In particular I disagree with the appellant's view that it would be settled into the landscape. On the contrary I consider that it would be prominent when seen from the south west.
9. An ameliorating factor is that public views from the neighbouring countryside are limited to those available from the public footpath which, as discussed above, are frequently screened by intervening vegetation. However, even though the house would be visible from only part of the footpath, anyone

walking along the footpath would be aware of its existence, with the consequence that the perception of a soft edge to this part of the village would be lost. Whilst there is backland development in other parts of the village the unbroken green boundary in this location is an asset in its own right which would be devalued if the proposed development was carried out. There is the further consequence that allowing this appeal would make it difficult for the Council to resist other proposals for backland development on this side of First Drift with the result that the character of this part of the village and the neighbouring countryside could be progressively eroded.

10. I have given some thought to the level of footpath use. It is clearly not heavily used because the sward through the field is unbroken. Nevertheless it is used sufficiently for me to have been able to discern the line of the path. I am therefore satisfied that residents and visitors would be aware that the character of the settlement edge had changed. I also recognise that I viewed the site in late summer when the mainly deciduous trees are in full foliage and that both existing houses and the proposed house will have a greater impact on the view in winter when those trees lose their leaves. Even so I am satisfied that, because of its location, the proposed house would still be more prominent.
11. I am aware that there is another new house at the point where the footpath leaves the built-up part of the village. As with Hexthorpe House I do not know what considerations led the Council to grant planning permission for this house but it fits into the general pattern of development at the end of Second Drift and can clearly be differentiated from the proposal now before me.
12. I conclude that the proposed development would be detrimental to the character of this part of Wothorpe and to that of the nearby open countryside and would therefore conflict with the objectives of policy CS20 in the adopted Peterborough Core Strategy DPD, policy SA19 in the adopted Peterborough Site Allocations DPD and policy PP2 in the adopted Peterborough Planning Policies DPD.
13. I acknowledge the Council's concern that the formation of a new drive alongside the existing one would detract from the street scene but I give this concern relatively little weight given the amount of obvious new development that has taken place on First Drift in recent years. I also acknowledge that the unilateral undertaking prepared and signed by the appellant and the opportunity to impose a condition relating to the Council's Environment Capital Agenda overcome the second and third reasons for refusal. These matters do not however change my opinion that the proposal is unacceptable because of its effect on the character of the village and the surrounding countryside.

George Arrowsmith

INSPECTOR

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