

Parish:	Methwold	
Proposal:	Proposed dwelling	
Location:	Land S of 22 E of 12 Thornham Road And N of 40 Holme Brink Farm 22 Thornham Road, Methwold, IP26 4PH	
Applicant:	Mr Andrew Wortley	
Case No:	22/00461/F (Full Application)	
Case Officer:	Mrs C Dorgan	Date for Determination: 27 April 2022 Extension of Time Expiry Date: 12 May 2022

Reason for Referral to Planning Committee – Called in by Cllr Ryves

Neighbourhood Plan: No

Case Summary

The application seeks full planning consent for a site of 0.97ha currently in use as agricultural land for the construction of a substantial detached four bedroom two-storey dwelling with a large garage, a driveway with parking/turning and a large area of amenity space. Access is proposed via Thornham Road.

The application site is located to the north east of Thornham Road, Methwold to the north east of the village. The site is adjacent to but located outside the development boundary for the village as shown on Inset Map G59 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan (SADMPP) (2016). Methwold is designated as a joint Key Rural Service Centre (KRSC) in the adopted Local Plan.

The site also adjoins the boundary of Methwold Conservation Area.

Key Issues

- Principle of Development
- Highways/ Access
- Form and Character / Impact on Conservation Area
- Neighbour Amenity
- Other Material Considerations

Recommendation

REFUSE

THE APPLICATION

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The site is currently agricultural land although the applicant states it is too small an area to farm. There are no notable features within the site itself. The site forms part of the larger Laurel Farm with buildings and agricultural land to the north of the application site. Current site access is via Laurel Farm although the application seeks to close off this access and utilise the existing access to Holmebrink Farmhouse.

The topography of the site is largely flat throughout although the land does drop away at the northern boundary, so the adjacent farmyard to the north is at a lower level. In terms of existing boundary treatments; the eastern boundary includes hawthorn hedging and a row of fir trees which runs to the southern corner with a 1.8m brick wall. The western boundary is a timber post and rail fence with some low level hedging.

SUPPORTING CASE

Need for a New Dwelling

- The proposed dwelling is a self-build home for the proprietors of the local farming business O.W.Wortley & Sons Ltd. The dwelling will be a lifetime home for the applicants - who wish to retire and pass over more of the running of the farm to younger generations of the family.
- The home has been designed with wheelchair use in mind, with features such as an accessible lift, open plan ground floor living, wide doorways and hallways, and adaptable bathrooms.
- The dwelling will allow the applicant's son to move into their existing farmhouse, becoming custodian of the farmyard and being proactive in the day-to-day running of the farm. Sadly, the farm has been a victim of rural crime and there is an ever increasing need to provide additional round the clock security.

Design

- The design of the home has been carefully considered to be in keeping with the local charm and character of Methwold. The bespoke design is a Norfolk country farmhouse vernacular, with architectural features to include traditional oak framework, staggered rooflines, oversized eaves, feature glazing and eyebrow dormers. A high quality palette of materials will be used including multi-facing bricks and traditional Norfolk pantiles.

Ecology and Biodiversity

- Extensive tree planting has already started across the farm, and this proposal looks to undertake considerably more. A nature pond is proposed as well as bird/owl boxes, bat boxes, sparrow terraces and hedgehog housing. A wildflower meadow will also significantly elevate the biodiversity of the existing grassed meadow.

Sustainability

- The site is sustainably located as an infill site adjacent to the development boundary in a Key Rural Service Centre, and has previously been considered suitable for housing allocation.
- Renewable energies such as solar panels and air source heat pumps are proposed, as well as sustainable methods of construction to include 'thin joint construction' using recycled concrete blockwork and ultra-wide insulated cavity walls.

Supporting Self and Custom Build

- The ongoing Local Plan Review identifies that suitable sites for housing may be found adjacent to the settlement boundaries. A new policy is being drafted as "Policy LP31 Residential Development Reasonably Related to Existing Settlements Policy". This draft policy looks to support custom and self-build housing by applying additional weight to sites such as this which are adjacent to existing settlements.
- There is also a national directive to support more custom and self-build housing. The LPA has a duty under the Self and Custom Build Housing Act 2015 and the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to keep a register of those wishing to commission or build their own homes, and to grant enough permissions to fulfil the identified need. This proposal would meet the needs of the applicants whom are on the LPA's register.

In conclusion, the proposal offers an attractive farmhouse in a Key Rural Service Centre. The development will be a self-build and entirely custom designed to suit the applicants as a lifetime home, as well as allowing them to be in sight and sound of their working farm.

PLANNING HISTORY

None

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

Parish Council: NO COMMENTS RECEIVED

Highways Authority: NO OBJECTION subject to conditions

While the road is narrow and the LHA would not therefore usually accept the principle of such a development, the length to travel on the narrowed section of road would be short as being principally from the village direction. Additionally, there are no recorded accidents on the section of Thornham Road in the past 5 years. On balance, it would be difficult to substantiate an objection to the application on highway grounds and recommend conditions are attached re the access.

Conservation Officer: Makes the following comments:

The Conservation Area Advisory Panel had no objection to the development in principle as the site was large and set back from view. The Panel made comments on the proposed materials, in particular the amount of boarding, and felt that there may be a missed opportunity on what could be achieved on the site.

However, would not entirely agree with the comments of CAAP, although note the points made about the size of the site and the distance set back. Whilst some of the buildings directly in front of the site are modern, Globe Street as a whole contains many important unlisted buildings, many of which illustrate the rural history of the village and relate to the open countryside behind them. This characteristic contributes to the significance of the Methwold Conservation Area and is noted in the Character Statement. By constructing on land behind this established development and which is outside the village boundary, this link between rural countryside and the linear nature and appearance of Globe Street is broken. This will also reduce the sense of rural space and countryside around the village as whole, as has happened elsewhere in the Conservation Area (Crown Street). This will cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the conservation area.

Environmental Health & Housing – Environmental Quality: NO OBJECTION

The applicant has provided a screening assessment and predetermination questionnaire which state no known contamination. The Design and Access statement reports that the site is an open field formally part of Laurel Farm, but it has not been used for agricultural purposes for several years. The D&A Statement also includes reference to historical maps and it reports that they show little development near the site until the 1988 Aerial Map where some buildings further down Globe Street start to emerge. The site appears to have been agricultural land associated with the existing barn.

Historical mapping and aerial photography on our files confirm that the surrounding landscape is largely residential and agricultural. No significant sources of contamination are identified in our records, or in the information provided by the applicant. Therefore, no objection regarding contaminated land.

Natural England: NO OBJECTION

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on designated sites and has no objection.

REPRESENTATIONS: NONE RECEIVED

LDF CORE STRATEGY POLICIES

CS06 - Development in Rural Areas

CS08 - Sustainable Development

CS09 - Housing Distribution

CS11 – Transport

CS12 - Environmental Assets

SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES PLAN 2016

DM2 – Development Boundaries

DM15 – Environment, Design and Amenity

DM17 - Parking Provision in New Development

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

National Design Guide 2019

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The following issues are matters for consideration in the determination of this application-

Principle of Development

Highways/ Access

Form and Character / Impact on Conservation Area

Neighbour Amenity

Other Material Considerations

Principle of Development

Methwold is categorised as a Joint Key Rural Service Centre in Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy (2011) (CS) and therefore benefits from a settlement boundary to guide development to the most sustainable positions. This application site is outside the development boundary for Methwold and therefore is considered to be within the wider countryside for the purposes of Policy DM2 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan (2016)(SADMPP). Policy DM2 states that areas outside development boundaries will be treated as countryside where new development will be more restricted and will be limited to that identified as suitable in rural areas by other policies in the plan. This proposal does not meet any of the requirements of these other policies. This stance is reinforced by paragraph 174 of the NPPF (2021) which recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supports the protection of the countryside.

Within the Design and Access Statement the applicant has sought to put great weight on the fact that this would be a self build plot. Reference is made to Government guidance requiring LPAs to support and enable this form of development. The Council does have a custom/self build register and an action plan on how to assist with this form of development. The Housing and Planning Act (2016) requires Councils to grant sufficient consents to meet the demand on the register. This is monitored annually. The Borough Council has exceeded the demand every year aside from 2020-21, however the Council has a period of three years to meet the demand. The Local Plan Review includes policies to support this form of development, which will further seek to meet the likely demand. The fact that this is a self-build plot is not sufficient justification to outweigh the policy approach in the adopted Local Plan, as the Borough Council are broadly meeting the demand.

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The applicant states that the dwelling is needed to enable the applicant's son to move into Holmebrink Farmhouse. However, the applicant owns a number of existing dwellings within close proximity to Laurel Farm and no evidence has been submitted as to why these cannot be used. The applicant has not submitted a case for the need for the dwelling in line with Policy DM6 of the SADMPP and it is not considered that this need is justification for the development.

Therefore, in terms of the principle of development, the proposal is contrary to the NPPF and the adopted development plan specifically policies CS02, and CS06 of the CS and policies DM2 and DM6 of the SADMPP.

Highways/ Access

Access to the proposed dwelling is via the existing private access to Holmebrink Farmhouse, off Thornham Road. The applicant has proposed that the existing access (2.75m wide) is widened to 4.8m to allow two vehicles to pass. The Local Highway Authority does raise concerns about the access via Thornham Road due to the fact it is narrow in part. However, it is also accepted that it is only a short distance to travel along this narrow road from the village to gain access to the site. This, in addition to the fact that there have been no recorded accidents in this location over the last five years, means that the Local Highway Authority does not object to the scheme. This is subject to conditions securing improvements to the existing vehicular access, and that gates shall not be erected across the access until details have first been submitted to the LHA.

The proposal therefore complies with the NPPF, and policies CS11 of the CS and policy DM15 of the SADMPP insofar as highways matters.

Form and Character / Impact on Conservation Area

The application site lies to the north of the built extent of the village, adjacent to the development boundary and the Conservation Area. In terms of form and character in this locality the edge of village location means that built form (largely residential) becomes less dense as you move east from Globe Street to Thornham Road. To the south of the application site is frontage development, with a large detached dwelling to the northwest and a farmyard with large scale agricultural buildings to the north. West of the site is residential development fronting onto Thornham Road.

The proposed dwelling itself is a substantial two storey four bedroom dwelling with large garages. The dwelling is 8m in height (at ridge) and with a footprint of 19m by 28m wide. The materials proposed include timber cladding with exposed oak post/ frame detailing with a dark Norfolk pantile roof, a red/ brown multi brick and neutral grey cladding with substantial glazing. The proposed design and form of the dwelling is considered acceptable.

The proposed scheme includes a large area of private amenity space and the applicant has indicated on the plans submitted and within the Design and Access Statement that a landscaping scheme would be used to enhance the site, and minimise the impact of the development on the countryside and Conservation Area. The landscaping scheme will also seek to include a range of ecological features to enhance biodiversity. The applicant does suggest however that the detailed landscaping scheme should be conditioned, and this is considered an acceptable approach.

The applicant has provided street scene images as part of their application which illustrate that the dwelling would largely be screened from the public highway by existing planting/ trees and the built form, although you will have intermittent views as you travel along Globe

Street and onto Thornham Road. This would be in the context of the existing built form however.

While there is existing residential development to the south and west; the development to the north is agricultural in nature and the development of this area of agricultural land will extend the domestic character further into the countryside with no justification.

Methwold Conservation Area Character Statement refers to the rural setting of the village reaching into the Conservation Area, and that the village retains its strong links with agriculture. The built up area of the conservation area has a fine rural setting to the west and east. Barns and agricultural buildings are very important to the character of the village streets, retaining this rural character. In addition one of the objectives for Methwold Conservation Area is 'protecting the setting of the Conservation Area from development which adversely affects views into or out of the area.'

The application was considered at the Conservation Area Advisory Panel and they did not object to the scheme, as the site is large and set back from view. They did comment on the proposed materials, in particular the amount of boarding, and felt that there may be a missed opportunity on what could be achieved on the site.

The Conservation Officer does not entirely agree with CAAP. His view is that while some of the buildings directly in front of the site are modern, Globe Street as a whole contains many important unlisted buildings, many of which illustrate the rural history of the village and relate to the open countryside behind them. This characteristic contributes to the significance of the Methwold Conservation Area and is noted in the Character Statement. By constructing on land behind this established development and which is outside the village boundary, this link between rural countryside and the linear nature and appearance of Globe Street is broken. This will also reduce the sense of rural space and countryside around the village as whole, as has happened elsewhere in the Conservation Area (Crown Street). This will cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the conservation area.

Paragraph 202 of the NPPF states that 'where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, where appropriate, securing its optimum use.' There are no public benefits to the scheme, and from a conservation/ form and character point of view the optimum use of the site would be to retain this as agricultural land.

In summary, the development would have a detrimental impact on the form and character of the locality and the Conservation Area itself by extending residential development into countryside, thereby reducing the links between the historic core of the village and the agricultural land beyond. That said the harm to the Conservation Area is considered to be less than substantial. Paragraph 202 of the NPPF requires that this harm is weighed against public benefit of the scheme. It is our view there is no public benefit to the scheme. Therefore the development is contrary to the NPPF and policy CS12 of the CS (2011).

Neighbour Amenity

The proposed dwelling is 48m to Holmebrink Farmhouse to the northwest, approximately 90m to the dwellings to the west and approximately 80m to the closest dwelling on Globe Street. It is considered that these distances are sufficient that there would not be a loss of privacy, or overshadowing as a result of the proposed development. The use of the existing access for an additional dwelling would also not give rise to neighbour amenity issues.

In terms of the residential amenity of the residents of the proposed dwelling, while the dwelling would be within 22m of the working farmyard these are in the same ownership. Furthermore, the applicant has stated that the design and layout of the dwelling is such that on the north elevation the number of windows has been minimised to limit any noise/disturbance from the farmyard.

The development would not give rise to residential/ neighbour amenity issues in accordance with the NPPF and DM15 of the SADMPP (2016).

Other Material Considerations

Local Plan Review – The applicant’s Design and Access Statement refers to the emerging Local Plan Review and proposed policies within this document. The revised plan is still evolving and has not been examined as yet, it is therefore not yet a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The current adopted Local Plan is the appropriate policy framework.

Flood Risk - The site is located within Flood Zone 1 of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2018 and is therefore at lowest risk of flooding.

Drainage – Drainage arrangements have not been supplied as part of the application and would be conditioned.

There are no objections received or conditions required from Natural England or Environmental Quality.

CONCLUSION

The application site is located outside of the development boundary as defined by Inset Map G59 of the SADMPP (2016). Policies CS06 of the CS and DM2 of the SADMPP seek to protect the countryside and restrict new development in the countryside. The proposal does not meet any of the exception criteria within policy DM2, and therefore the principle of development is contrary to the adopted Local Plan.

The development would represent an extension of domestic built form into countryside, changing the character of the land from agricultural to residential on an edge of village site. The Conservation Officer raises concerns that by allowing such development this will be interrupting and weakening the links between the historic core of the village and the views and associations with the countryside beyond. However, the harm is less than substantial and paragraph 202 of the NPPF requires that this harm is weighed against public benefit. Given there is not considered to be a public benefit from the development, the proposal is considered contrary to the NPPF in this regard.

It is thereby recommended that Members refuse the application due to the fact the scheme fails to accord with the provisions of the NPPF, and the adopted Local Plan policies CS01, CS02, CS06, CS08, CS12 of the CS and DM2 and DM6 of the SADMPP.

RECOMMENDATION:

REFUSE for the following reasons:

- 1 The site lies outside of the development boundary for Methwold where development is restricted to that identified as sustainable in rural areas. The Borough Council can

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currently demonstrate a housing land supply of in excess of the required figure and no justification has been provided that outweighs the policies of the local plan. The proposal constitutes the inappropriate development of a greenfield site in the countryside for the purposes of Policy DM2 of the SADMPP (2016) and the provision of an additional dwelling in this location will not promote sustainable development or enhance or maintain the vitality of the rural community in accordance with Paragraph 79 of the NPPF (2021). The development is therefore considered contrary to the overarching aims of the NPPF (2021), Policies CS01, CS02, CS06 and CS08 of the Core Strategy (2011) and Policy DM2 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan (2016).

- 2 The application site is located adjacent to Methwold Conservation Area and currently comprises an area of agricultural land to the rear of linear residential development along Globe Street. The agricultural land contributes to the rural setting which reaches into the Conservation Area, providing views into and out of, and reinforcing the village's strong links with agriculture.

The proposed construction of the dwelling would result in the loss of this agricultural land which currently characterises and contributes to the rural setting of the Conservation Area. It would, in the absence of public benefits, cause harm to the Conservation Area and would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and is therefore contrary to paragraphs 200, 202 and 206 of the NPPF and Policies CS08 and CS12 of the Core Strategy (2011) and DM15 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan (2016).