
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 July 2016

by Rory Cridland LLB (Hons)

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

Decision date: 2nd September 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/16/3146886

Meadow Brook Farm, Ball Hill, Newbury, Berkshire RG20 0PB

- 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 Mr & Mrs John Blyth against the decision of Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 15/04038/FUL, dated 12 November 2015, was refused by notice dated 14 January 2016.
 - The development proposed is a 2 bedroom dwelling following demolition of pole barn, rest room, hay barn and store.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matter

2. Since determining the application the Council has adopted a new development plan, the Local Plan 2011-2029 (LP)¹. This appeal must be determined in accordance with the development plan in place at the time and, as such, it is these new LP Policies to which I have had regard in reaching my conclusions below.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - (i) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including on the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and
 - (ii) whether the site offers an acceptable location for the proposed development, having regard to its accessibility to local facilities.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site is located in a quiet area situated within the AONB and currently consists of a pole barn, stable block and barn surrounded by paddocks. The surrounding area is rural and consists of mostly farmland interspersed with residential dwellings which integrate well into the sensitive landscape.

¹ Basingstoke and Deane Borough Adopted Local Plan (May 2016)

5. The proposal would result in the demolition of the pole barn, hay barn and store and their replacement with a two storey dwelling. It would involve a significant increase in height and scale, would see an increase in the amount of glazing and would inevitably involve the introduction of domestic paraphernalia into an area where presently there is none. This would erode the rural character of the site, materially altering the visual aesthetic and the contribution it makes to the surrounding sensitive landscape.
6. Furthermore, although surrounded by mature vegetation, the site is clearly visible from large stretches of the nearby footpath. Although at present the structures do not detract from the wider countryside setting, the proposed dwelling, with its increased height and residential appearance, would negatively impact on the landscape. In view of its sensitive nature, this would be harmful to the AONB, a matter which I afford great weight.
7. While I note the appellants' have proposed additional screening, this would take some time to mature and would in any case be insufficient to fully mitigate the impact that the proposal would have on its surroundings, particularly during the winter months when screening would be significantly reduced.
8. Consequently, I find that the proposal would fail to respect the character of the surrounding landscape and would be detrimental to the wider AONB. As such, it would conflict with LP Policy EM1 which requires development proposals to respect, enhance and not be detrimental to the character or visual amenity of the landscape likely to be affected and recognises the importance of the landscape of the AONB and its sensitivity to change.

Accessibility

9. LP Policy SS6 restricts new developments outside defined settlement boundaries other than in a small number of circumstances. These include where the development is on previously developed land and would not result in an isolated form of development. In addition, it requires that the proposed use and scale is appropriate to the site's context.
10. The proposed dwelling would be located outside any defined settlement boundary, separated from other more concentrated residential development and physically remote from local services. Although the village of Ball Hill is located nearby, and Woolton Hill is approximately 1km away, these offer a limited number of services which would be insufficient to meet the daily needs of future occupiers. They would instead be required to travel further afield to access even basic services.
11. Although there is a bus stop a short walk away, the service on offer is limited. Similarly, in view of the distances involved and the limited footways or cycling provision on the surrounding highway network, it is unlikely that future occupiers would utilise other more sustainable modes of transport and would instead be heavily reliant on the private car.
12. While I acknowledge the modest benefit that would arise from a reduction in the appellants personal car use in travelling between the appeal site and their home address, that does not overcome the lack of sustainable transport choice that the proposal would offer to future occupiers.

13. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would result in an isolated form of development that would provide inadequate travel opportunities for future occupiers. As such, I find it contrary to LP Policy SS6.

Other matters

14. I have noted the other sites and decisions referred to me by the parties. However, from the information available, I do not regard these schemes as sufficiently similar, either in terms of location, development, size, scale or impact to act as a justifiable precedent for the development proposed. In any event, each application should be determined on its own merit and that is the approach I have taken in this appeal.
15. I have also had regard to the letters of support for the scheme which were submitted as part of this appeal process. While I acknowledge that the development of this site would increase security and be welcomed by nearby residents, that is not sufficient to overcome the policy objections identified above.
16. While I note the personal circumstances of the appellants and their desire to relocate to be closer to their horses, they are not sufficiently material to overcome the restrictions on new development in the countryside which are set out in the Local Plan.
17. At the time of determination, the Council was unable to demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing land. However, following the adoption of the LP, the Council is now able to demonstrate such a supply as required by the National Planning Policy Framework ("the Framework"). As such, paragraphs 49 & 14 of the Framework are not engaged. Nevertheless, I consider the modest benefit that would arise from the proposal to be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the harm identified above.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Rory Cridland

INSPECTOR