
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 October 2016

by Rory Cridland LLB (Hons)

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

Decision date: 04 November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/C1760/W/16/3151438

Andover Garden Centre, Salisbury Road, Little Ann Bridge, Hampshire, SP11 7DN

- 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 Andover Garden Centre against the decision of Test Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 15/01813/FULLN, dated 24 July 2015, was refused by notice dated 24 February 2016.
 - The development proposed is extension of garden centre car park.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issue are:
 - (i) whether there is an essential need for the development to be located in the countryside; and
 - (ii) the effect of the proposal on the Andover-Anna Valley/Upper Clatford Local Gap ("the Local Gap") and on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located on land designated as countryside within the Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan DPD (2011-2029)¹ (LP). The site itself consists of large area of open space located directly adjacent to the existing garden centre car park. I understand that the area is currently used as an informal overflow car park for use by garden centre customers at busy periods. The proposal would involve the hard surfacing of a part of this area to create additional parking on a permanent basis.
4. LP Policy COM2 restricts development outside recognised settlement boundaries other than in a limited number of circumstances, including where it is essential for the proposal to be located in the countryside. In order to satisfy this exemption, the appellant must demonstrate that it is *essential* that the proposal be located in the countryside.

¹ Adopted January 2016

5. The appellant has argued that the additional spaces are required to meet the car parking needs of its customers which have increased over recent years. In support of this, a number of parking surveys have been submitted which indicate that the existing car park reaches operational capacity at various times throughout the year. During these times, the appeal site acts as a temporary overflow car park and meets this demand. However, the demand is periodic and it is clear that for large parts of the year operational capacity is not reached and the existing provision is sufficient to meet demand.
6. While I accept that an increase in parking would be beneficial to the business and its customers, no robust evidence has been provided which establishes that the need for parking cannot be accommodated elsewhere or that other suitable arrangements cannot be put in place which would help alleviate congestion on site during times of peak demand. In the absence of such information, I do not consider the appellant to have demonstrated the essential need required by LP Policy COM2.
7. While I note that the survey data indicates that use of the temporary facilities would be required for more than the 28 days allowed for under permitted development rights, I do not regard this as sufficient to overcome the policy objection identified above. Likewise, while I note the suggestion that without use of the overflow car park there is potential for adverse impacts on the surrounding highway network, no robust evidence has been provided which would lead me to conclude that this would be the case or that any impacts would be significant.
8. Consequently, I find that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that there is an essential need for the proposal to be located in the countryside, and as such, consider it would be contrary to LP Policy COM2.

Character and appearance

9. The appeal site is located in the Local Gap which separates Abbots Ann from the larger settlement of Andover. LP Policy E3 permits development within local gaps provided that it does not diminish the physical separation and/or visual separation and does not compromise their integrity, either individually or cumulatively. This is supported by the Abbots Ann Village Design Statement² which advises that the natural gap between the settlement of Abbots Ann and Andover should be maintained.
10. LP Policy E2 seeks to protect, conserve and enhance the landscape of the borough. In doing so, it permits new development provided that it does not have a detrimental impact on the appearance of the immediate area, is designed and located to ensure the health and future retention of important landscape features and it positively integrates into the landscape character of the area.
11. The proposed development would extend the area of developed land east towards Andover and, in doing so, would diminish the physical separation provided by the Local Gap. However, in view of its location in the wider garden centre complex, coupled with the extensive landscaping which delineates the boundaries to the north and east, the appeal site's contribution to the integrity of the Local Gap is limited. Likewise, the impact of the proposed car park

² (2000)

extension on the Local Gap would be limited. It would appear as an integral part of the existing car park and would not result in the appearance of encroachment into the wider countryside. Likewise, it would not be detrimental to the appearance of the immediate area.

12. Furthermore, although the proposal would be visible from within the garden centre site itself, it would appear as a continuation of the existing car park, and would integrate well into its surroundings. Similarly, the vegetation along the northern boundary would provide significant screening of the site from the nearby A343, while that along the eastern boundary would help ensure that any visual impact on the Local Gap or that of the immediate area was limited. While I note the Council's concerns regarding the increased visibility of the site during periods of low leaf cover, both the type and number of trees involved would ensure that the site would continue to be considerably screened during these periods.
13. Accordingly, I do not consider that the proposal would result in the diminution of the physical or visual separation provided by the Local Gap or would materially erode the transition between the overall garden centre site and the wider countryside to the east. I am therefore satisfied that the integrity of the Local Gap would not be compromised. Likewise, I do not consider it would result in any materially adverse impacts on the appearance of the immediate area.
14. Consequently, I find no conflict with LP Policies E2 and E3 which, amongst other things, seek to ensure that new development does not have a detrimental impact on the appearance of the immediate area and does not compromise the integrity of local gaps.

Conclusion

15. Although I have found that the development would not have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and would not materially compromise the integrity of the Local Gap, I have nevertheless found that it fails to demonstrate that there is an essential need for the development to be located in the countryside, contrary to LP Policy COM2. For this reason, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Rory Cridland

INSPECTOR

