
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 January 2017

by Patrick Whelan BA(Hons) Dip Arch MA MSc ARB RIBA RTPI

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

Decision date: 22 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/W/16/3161946

Land at Gardeners Hill Road, Wrecclesham, Farnham GU10 3JB

- 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 Ms B King against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref WA/2016/1127, dated 19 May 2016, was refused by notice dated 26 August 2016.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 2 new dwellings and associated garaging, and formation of a new access from Gardener's Hill Road.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. While the Council's reasons for refusal of the application included the effect of the proposal on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area it has confirmed that this was applied in error and that it no longer defends this reason. Accordingly, the main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character of the countryside.

Reasons

3. The appeal site, last used as a paddock, is located outside any settlement boundary, in the countryside, in which context the Council refers to Policy C2 of the Local Plan 2002 (LP). This Policy seeks to protect the countryside for its own sake, which is more prescriptive than and therefore inconsistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, which in paragraph 17 sets out 12 core planning principles, one of which includes that planning should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. This therefore limits the weight I may attach to Policy C2.
 4. However, the Council also refers to LP Policies D1 and D4. Policy D1 says that development will not be permitted which would result in harm to the visual character and distinctiveness of a locality, particularly in respect of the design and scale of the development, and its relationship to its surroundings. Policy D4 seeks development which integrates well with the site, and complements its surroundings, respecting the local distinctiveness of the area.
 5. Notwithstanding its location in the countryside, since the Council refused the application the subject of this appeal, it has granted planning permission for the development of two, detached houses on this site, smaller than those in this proposal. It maintains, however, that the quantum of development in this
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- proposal, in terms of its mass and form, would be harmful to the character of the countryside.
6. My impression of the area is that while the east of the site is enclosed by a shelterbelt of trees alongside the road, to the west the site has a more open character, enclosed only by a low hedge bordering the open countryside on rising ground, which extends westwards for around 900m to the edge of Rowledge. The housing occupying the plots to the north and south of the site, and along the lane Frensham Court, suggests the character of a small enclave of dwellings set in the open countryside. However, many of the houses in the environs of the site are single storey, or have low plot ratios and low site coverage. These factors contribute to the distinctive, spacious character of the enclave, which settles it sensitively within the character of the surrounding countryside of fields and woodland.
 7. The height of the proposed houses would not be out of place with many of the neighbouring houses, and their design has been carefully modelled and detailed, and includes interesting roofscapes. However, the space between the proposed houses and their site boundaries would be substantially less than that of the neighbouring houses. The site coverage of the proposed houses, in terms of their footprints and the volume of development, would appear significantly greater. In this distinctive spatial context, and given the character of the surrounding housing, the proposed houses would appear out of scale in terms of their volume and the space retained around them.
 8. I note the conclusions of the Landscape and Visual Assessment and agree that the landscape is not remote or unsettled. I have taken into account the degree of enclosure around the curtilage of the site, and the additional tree planting and hedging proposed. However, the proposal would be visible from surrounding land and dwellings, particularly when trees are not in leaf. I have also borne in mind that in the wider area there are houses with larger footprints than those which adjoin the site. However, none of these factors diminish the incompatibility of the proposal with the distinctive spatial character of its countryside surroundings and the pattern of development of its architectural context identified above.
 9. The proposal would thus have a materially harmful effect on the character of the area, and would conflict with saved Policies D1 and D4 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan 2002. It would be at odds too with the core planning principle of the Framework, that planning should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and with its advice that developments should respond to local character. It would fail to accord with the Planning Practice Guidance¹ which advises that development should seek to promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development.

Other Matters

10. The views of local residents, Farnham Town Council and the Farnham Society have been taken into consideration, and I have already dealt with what I regard as the main planning issue. I note the concern over the potential for additional traffic movements generated by the proposal, however, in the context of the existing level of traffic on the surrounding roads the proposal is

¹ Planning Practice Guidance, DCLG 2014 as amended, paragraph:007, ID 26-007-20140306

unlikely to lead to a significant increase in movements. There is no evidence that the additional vehicle movements or the proposed access onto Gardeners Hill Road would be unsafe, and I note that the highway authority does not object to the proposal.

11. The Council's statement on housing supply indicates that it has 5.3 years of supply in terms of paragraph 47 of the Framework. However, the appellant's review challenges this and concludes it is significantly less. She also refers to an appeal decision² in this Borough earlier this year which concluded that the level of deliverable housing land supply is likely to fall within the range of 3.4 years to 4.6 years. In the context of a shortfall in housing supply, the proposal would provide two additional houses as well as the social and economic benefits associated with the development, to which I attach considerable weight. However, this is significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the unacceptable harm it would cause to the character of the area, which is in clear conflict with the policies of the development plan.

Conclusion

12. For the reasons given above, and taking account of all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Patrick Whelan

INSPECTOR

² Appeal Ref APP/R3650/W/15/3141255