
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 January 2017

by L Gibbons BA (Hons) MRTPI

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

Decision date: 23 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/16/3162803

Land adjacent to Braefoot, Southbrook Road, West Ashling PO18 8DN

- 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 Robert Bruce against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref SDNP/16/04021/FUL, dated 9 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 19 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is the construction of three bedroom thatched roof dwelling and double garage/car port following clearance of site including a shed and two existing caravans one being residentially occupied, installation of access gate, fences and landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The parties refer to Policies SD5, SD6, SD22 and SD23 of the Draft South Downs Local Plan 2015 (SDLP). The plan has been the subject of consultation although it has not yet been examined. Given the stage the SDLP has reached I give it little weight.

Main Issues

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, having regard to its location within the South Downs National Park (SDNP).

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located on the east side of Southbrook Road within the SDNP. It is to the south of West Ashling and the boundary of the dwelling known as Braefoot. West Ashling is a small village which has a fairly compact pattern of development with houses close together centred on older buildings. There is a recent housing development to the west of the appeal site although its layout is also fairly compact. The land to the south of West Ashling is flat, with tall hedgerows along the roadside. There are paddocks and fields to the south of the appeal site. Overall, the area has a very verdant and enclosed quality, and a strongly rural character and setting to the village.
 5. The boundary of the appeal site with Braefoot is a thick hedgerow and mature trees. It is representative of the sense of enclosure within the landscape and provides a clear boundary between the appeal site and the village. The appeal
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site was formerly in horticultural use and for the grazing of horses with structures and some hardstanding having been present on the site in the past. Horse grazing still takes place in the immediate area adjacent to the appeal site. The access has been upgraded in respect of safety improvements and maintains a right of access to the rear of the site.

6. At the time of my visit a large static caravan and adjoining small outbuilding were positioned adjacent to the appeal site. The land on which the appeal site is located is slightly raised and the caravan is fairly prominent when seen from the road. Grass has been laid to the front garden and there is a post and rail fence along the front boundary with some low height planting. There is also a small caravan located within the appeal site. Hedgerows have been partially removed and there is a more open feel to the appeal site than is found within the village and Southbrook Road beyond the village. The features on the site contribute to a significantly more suburban appearance than most of the surrounding area, with the exception of Portal Close to the west.
7. The appeal site is not located within a Conservation Area. It is in the countryside for development plan purposes. Saved Policy RE1 of the Chichester District Local Plan (LP) 1999 states that development will be restricted in the countryside unless it meets specific policies elsewhere in the plan, none of which apply in this case. The Council refer to the site being excluded from the village boundary of West Ashling within the emerging SDLP and that the village is not identified for further housing allocations. The appellant refers to the appeal site in preference to other locations considered as part of the SDLP and the role of windfall sites.
8. The proposal is for a single dwelling which would be located fairly centrally within the plot although much closer to the road than the static caravan. The detailed design and use of traditional materials would be similar to some other buildings found in the wider area. However, due to the open nature of the site and height of the site relative to the road, the house would be prominent with the long main elevation facing towards the road in fairly close proximity to it. The height and bulk of the house, which would be exacerbated by the large thatched roof would appear imposing and would draw the eye. Large areas of hardstanding and formal landscaping would introduce a stronger suburban character than exists even with the modifications made to the appeal site recently.
9. Moreover, it would be located some distance away from Braefoot and this separation would appear strongly out of character with the tightly knit form of the village. The scheme would extend development in a ribbon form which would be to the detriment of the overall rural appearance of the road and entrance and exit to the village. I consider there would be a significant negative change in the character of the setting of the village.
10. The appellant refers to the houses at Portal Close. From the information before me, that scheme was granted planning permission in accordance with one of the exceptions of saved Policy RE1 of the LP in relation to the provision of affordable housing. As such, the circumstances of that scheme differ considerably from the one before me. In any case, I have determined the appeal on its own merits.
11. I accept that part of the site may previously have had an unkempt appearance and that the site has been cleared. However, its former use for horticultural

purposes and the surrounding grazing land would be uses which are generally compatible with the countryside, and this is not a sufficient reason to outweigh the harm I have found.

12. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would be in conflict with saved Policies RE1 and BE11 of the LP and emerging Policies SD5 and SD6 of the SDLP. These amongst other things seek new development which must not detract from its surroundings, respects the setting of settlements and should conserve and enhance the landscape character of the SDNP. It would also be contrary to the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in respect of the need for high quality design, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks.

Other matters

13. Paragraph 55 of the Framework indicates that local planning authorities should avoid isolated new homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances. There is no definition of isolated within the Framework. To access facilities such as shops, I accept that the future occupiers would need to make use of the private car for their everyday needs. However, the appeal site is located within walking distance of the village which has some very limited services and facilities, including a primary school and I consider a house in this location would not be isolated.
14. The parties do not agree as to whether the use of the land included residential occupation of caravans stationed there. I note that the Authority validated the planning application with the description of the development including a reference to residential occupation of the site. However, no evidence has been provided with the appeal in this respect and therefore I give this factor very little weight.

Conclusion

15. The Framework identifies three dimensions to sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. The Framework makes it clear that the three roles the planning system is required to perform in respect of sustainable development should not be undertaken in isolation because they are mutually dependent. The first part of paragraph 55 of the Framework sets out that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. The provision of a dwelling would add to the mix and number of dwellings within the area. Nevertheless, the contribution one dwelling would make to the vitality of the area would not be discernable.
16. The proposal would seek to incorporate sustainable construction methods and techniques. The Authority does not object to the proposal in terms of its effect on ecology and the scheme would include planting and a pond. These factors would have very limited weight in favour of the appeal proposal. The policies of the Framework in respect of the National Park, whilst not necessarily restricting development including small scale schemes, does indicate that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks. The combined adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area and SDNP would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of

the scheme. The scheme would not be sustainable development for which there is a presumption in favour.

17. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

L Gibbons

INSPECTOR