

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 April 2017

by Grahame Gould BA MPhil MRTPI

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

Decision date: 27th April 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Z3825/W/16/3165224

Longbury Hill House, Veras Walk, Storrington RH20 3JF

- 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 Tim Drake against the decision of Horsham District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/16/1908, dated 29 July 2016, was refused by notice dated 18 November 2016.
 - The development proposed is erection of one dwelling on residential land at Longbury Hill House.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are: the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area; and whether the site would be a suitable location for a dwelling.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. The development would involve the construction of a two storey house within part of the grounds of Longbury Hill House (the host property). The host property is of a bespoke design and it occupies a substantial plot at the end of a sloping lane, which is one of the lanes that make up Veras Walk. Veras Walk is a private street, amongst others, that comprise this part of Heath Common. Heath Common is a residential area characterised by dwellings of varying types and sizes within a sylvan setting.
 4. The pattern of the development in this area is an informal one and for the most part Veras Walk has been developed at a low density, with the degree of space between individual properties and their boundaries being notable. The area is therefore spacious in character, although in places there are limited gaps between some of the properties.
 5. The proposed house would be sited in very close proximity to its western boundary, a by-product of the plot's limited width and the immediacy of the mature planting that marks the plot's eastern boundary. This development would therefore fail to exhibit the spaciousness that is found in the immediately surrounding area and it would therefore not be in keeping with its context. In this respect the development would lack the spaciousness that
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is common to the host property and the likes of Hardwicke Lodge and Windrush. Those properties all occupy substantial plots, a characteristic that is consistent with them being in a transitional area between the more intensively developed parts of Heath Common and the countryside. The plot for the new house, at 0.09 hectares, would be smaller than its immediate neighbours, and I consider this would contribute to the development lacking the spaciousness of its surroundings.

6. Longbury Hill House, like a number of its neighbours, is outside the built-up area boundary (BUAB) for Storrington and is in the countryside for the purposes of the Horsham District Planning Framework (excluding South Downs National Park) of 2015 (the HDPF). However, the grounds of the host property are undeniably domestic in character and are enclosed by mature planting, most particularly along its eastern boundary. The development would allow for much of the established planting to be retained and given the size of the new house I consider that it would not be visually intrusive in the countryside.
7. While I consider that architecturally the new house's design would be acceptable, that would not address the visual harm that I have identified.
8. I conclude that because the development would lack the spaciousness of its surroundings it would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. There would therefore be conflict with Policies 32 and 33 of the HDPF because the layout of the development would not be in sympathy with the distinctiveness of its surroundings. However, as I have found that the development would not be harmful to the landscape character of the countryside, I consider that in this respect there would be no conflict with Policies 25, 26 and 31 of the HDPF

Suitability of the location for a dwelling

9. As the dwelling would be outside the BUAB it would be in a location where new development is discouraged under the provisions of Policies 2, 3 and 4 of the HDPF, with the growth strategy seeking to focus new development within the main settlements in the Council's area. The Council contends that the development would have an adverse effect on sustainability because of the demands it would place on supporting infrastructure (schools, transport and sewage). That is because for the first five years of the HDPF's plan period, ie 2011 to 2016, the provision of housing was to be accelerated to over 1,000 dwellings per annum, against the annual average of 800 dwellings over the whole of the plan period to 2031¹.
10. The first five years for the HDPF have now passed and I consider that the provision of a single dwelling would, in any event, be unlikely to generate any significant pressure on the local infrastructure. I am therefore not persuaded that this development's implications for infrastructure make this an unsuitable location for a dwelling.
11. The site is located at some distance from the centre of Storrington. That means the occupiers of the dwelling would be likely to depend on private motor vehicle usage to gain access to everyday local services and facilities, ie employment opportunities, schools, shopping and community services.

¹ As referred to in section 4 of the Council's appeal statement

However, the number of additional vehicle movements generated by an extra dwelling would be quite modest and comparable in number to those generated by each of the many properties in Heath Common and would thus not be out of place.

12. In my reasoning for the first main issue I have concluded that this development would not have an adverse effect on the countryside's landscape character. I therefore consider that the development's effect on the countryside's landscape character does not weigh against this site's suitability as a location for a dwelling.
13. As the development would be beyond the BUAB and concerns a site that has not been allocated for development, in either the Council's development plan or a neighbourhood plan, there would be conflict with Policies 1, 2, 3, 4 and 26 of the HDPF and paragraph 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework. That conflict would in part arise because there is not a specific functional need for the house to be located in the countryside. However, I consider that providing one house in this location, given the absence of harm to the countryside's landscape character and the proximity of other dwellings, would not materially undermine the HDPF's settlement strategy. I therefore conclude that this would be a suitable location for one dwelling.

Other Matters

14. The siting of the new house would mean that it would not adversely affect the living conditions of the occupiers of the neighbouring properties. The reduction in the extent of the area of hard surfacing would be of some benefit to the area's biodiversity. While the aforementioned matters weigh in favour of the development, I consider them to be outweighed by the harm to the character and appearance of the area that I have identified.
15. Reference has been made to the 'Yaffles appeal decision'², however, each case must be considered having regard to its site specific circumstances. I therefore consider that the Yaffles appeal decision is of no particular bearing on the determination of the current appeal.

Conclusions

16. While I have found that this would be a suitable location for an additional dwelling, the provision of the house would be harmful to the spacious character and appearance of the area. The harm that I have identified gives rise to conflict with the HDPF and because of that conflict this would be an unsustainable form of development. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Grahame Gould

INSPECTOR

² APP/Z3825/A/12/2185980