

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 April 2017

by J F Powis BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 1st June 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/W/17/3166902

Land to west of Withywindle, Abingdon Road, Burcot, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3DN

- 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 N Mullard and Mrs F Brann against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref P16/S2223/FUL, dated 23 June 2016, was refused by notice dated 19 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a pair of semi-detached three bedroom dwellings and a detached garage building.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Council accepts that it is currently unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites in the district. Development plan policies which relate to the supply of housing are therefore not up-to-date when considered in relation to paragraph 49 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Consequently, in accordance with paragraph 14 of the Framework, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. Nevertheless, I still must have regard to the development plan policies and decide whether or not the appeal proposal accords with them.

Background and Main Issue

3. The site lies within the Oxford Green Belt. Paragraph 89 of the Framework states that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt, subject to certain exceptions. One such exception is limited infilling in villages. Burcot is classified in Appendix 4 of the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (adopted December 2012) (CS) as a 'smaller village' in which Policy CSR1 supports the principle of infill development on sites of up to 0.2ha.
 4. The appeal site is approximately 0.18ha and surrounded on three sides by existing residential development, with the fourth side sitting parallel to Abingdon Road. The site sits amongst a continuous string of development along the southern side of Abingdon Road. As such, I am satisfied that the proposal would constitute limited infilling in the village and would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of paragraphs
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87, 89 and 90 of the Framework. As such, there would be no conflict with Policies CSR1 and CSEN2 of the CS, which together seek to protect the Green Belt.

5. On this basis, the main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area.

Reasons

6. The appeal site is a parcel of undeveloped land to the south of the A415 Abingdon Road in the small village of Burcot. Burcot follows a predominantly linear form along an east-west axis, with the majority of development lying between Abingdon Road to the north and the River Thames to the south.
7. The site is accessed via a private road serving a total of five existing dwellings. The access road frames the site on three sides whilst the existing house known as Withywindle lies immediately to the east. The proposed development involves the construction of a pair of semi-detached houses together with a detached garage building and gardens.
8. The age and character of the existing built form in the village as a whole is mixed. However, it is possible to discern distinct character areas within the settlement that reflect the development history of the village and are an important part of its local distinctiveness. The appeal site lies at the transition point between two such character areas. To the east, a string of close-knit period housing, including some terraced and semi-detached properties, runs along Abingdon Road. Immediately to the west and south, markedly larger detached properties sit in very generous grounds set away from Abingdon Road.
9. The appeal site does not front directly onto Abingdon Road, but rather is set back behind a wide grass verge with mature trees and planting that restrict views into the site from the main road. On entering the private access road, there is therefore some sense of distance from Abingdon Road and a degree of visual and physical disconnection from it. In my view, this sets the site apart from the existing development along Abingdon Road to the east and means that the proposed development would more readily be viewed in the context of the more spacious and dispersed form of development to the west and south.
10. The proposed houses would each comprise three bedrooms arranged over three floors. The quality and nature of the proposed external materials, such as red brickwork walls, plain clay tile roofs and painted timber windows, would take clear cues from those commonly seen in the village. The overall design, with traditional pitched roof form and strong projecting front and rear gables incorporating lead roofed bay windows together with leaded rear dormer windows, would be of high quality and sympathetic to its setting.
11. Notwithstanding this, I am concerned that the bulk and massing of the two dwellings on this relatively narrow site would be at odds with the surrounding pattern of development. The built form, at considerable height, would span almost the entire width of the site such that the houses would sit close to both side boundaries. This would be particularly pronounced in the north-western corner of the site where the front corner of unit 1 would be very close to the access road as it swept around the front and side of the house. I note that revisions to the proposal during the application stage reduced the total width of

the building by approximately 1 metre but regardless, do not consider that development before me sufficiently addresses my concerns in this regard. As a result, I find that relative to the surrounding form of development, the houses would appear cramped in their plot, to the detriment of the area's spacious and well-proportioned character.

12. In addition to the houses themselves, the site would accommodate a detached garage building and off-road parking spaces to the south of the site which would limit the garden space available to the houses. Whilst the resulting gardens would exceed the minimum space requirements recommended by local design guidance pursuant to saved Policy D3 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (adopted January 2006) (LP), they would nonetheless be considerably smaller than those typically seen in the immediately surrounding area, including the adjacent property known as Withywindle. This would further undermine the well-spaced nature of the built form in this part of the village that is important to the area's local distinctiveness.
13. Having regard to all of the above matters, I conclude that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area. As a result, it would be contrary to Policies CSR1 and CSQ3 of the CS and saved Policies D1 and H4 of the LP, which together seek to achieve high quality design that respects local character, distinctiveness and existing settlement patterns.

Planning Balance and Conclusions

14. The proposal would provide two new dwellings within the built up area of Burcot, where the development plan is supportive in principle of new residential development. This would bring social benefits that attract modest weight in the overall balance. The development would also generate employment and investment in the construction sector, bringing economic benefits. These effects would, however, be short-term and limited in extent and so carry little weight in the overall assessment.
15. No information about the extent of the current shortfall in housing land supply has been provided by either party. Nonetheless, the lack of a five-year housing land supply is in itself a matter to which I attach significant weight. In that context, I attach moderate weight to the development plan policies.
16. Nevertheless, set against that I am mindful that two additional dwellings would make only a small contribution to the shortfall in housing supply. I have also found that the proposed development would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area. In this sense it would directly conflict with the Framework's objectives of securing high quality design that takes account of the different roles and character of areas. This indicates that the environmental dimension of sustainable development would not be achieved. This is a matter that attracts substantial weight in the overall balance.
17. I therefore consider that on balance, the adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the limited benefits I have identified, when assessed against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole. Overall, the proposal would not constitute sustainable development in the sense of paragraph 14 of the Framework.

18. For this reason, I find that there are no material considerations that outweigh the conflict with the development plan. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J F Powis

INSPECTOR