



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 October 2017

by S M Holden BSc MSc CEng MICE TPP FCIHT MRTPI

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

Decision date: 27th November 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/17/3179237

Oak Tree Cottage, Aldworth Road, Upper Basildon, Reading RG8 8NH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Messrs and Mrs Walters and Clements against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref 17/00494/OUTD, dated 21 February 2017, was refused by notice dated 19 June 2017.
 - The development proposed is demolition of Oak Tree Cottage and construction of 3 detached dwellings with detached carports and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Messrs and Mrs Walters and Clements against West Berkshire Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Procedural Matters

3. The application was in outline with access, layout and scale to be determined at this stage. Appearance and landscaping were reserved for future consideration. In addition to a layout plan, the submitted drawing provided an illustration showing the front elevation of three dwellings. I have treated this as illustrative of the way in which three dwellings could appear on the site.
4. The Council gave three reasons for refusing the application. The second and third of these concerned the provision of parking spaces and lack of information relating to ecology. However, it subsequently admitted that these reasons for refusal were included in error. Its appeal statement explained that the proposal would meet the requirements of the parking standards set out in the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document. It also confirmed that the Protected Species Survey had satisfied its initial concerns in respect of biodiversity. Consequently, these matters could have been addressed through the imposition of appropriate conditions, if the development had been otherwise acceptable.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is therefore the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area having regard to its location in the North Wessex Area Downs of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

6. The appeal site is on Aldworth Road, one of the main roads passing through Upper Basildon, a linear rural settlement within the North Wessex Downs AONB. The western side of the road is characterised by large detached dwellings set in substantial plots. The settlement boundary runs through the rear gardens of these dwellings. Consequently, for the purposes of planning policy the houses are within the built-up area of the village, whereas most of the gardens lie within the countryside.
7. The appeal site is approximately 0.5 hectares in size. It is currently occupied by a modest, two-storey dwelling with low eaves and whose upper storey is contained within the roof space. That part of the site which is within the settlement boundary, but not occupied by the house, is private residential garden land and therefore excluded from the definition of previously developed land. The remainder of the site is countryside within the AONB.
8. Policy ADPP1 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (Core Strategy) states that smaller villages with settlement boundaries, such as Upper Basildon, are suitable for limited infilling, subject to the character and form of the settlement. There is therefore no objection in principle to a residential development on the site. The determining factor is whether or not the site can accommodate the proposal without harm to the local environment.
9. Abundant mature vegetation in the form of hedges, gardens and trees along Aldworth Road largely obscure the existing dwellings, which can only be glimpsed from the street. The properties on the western side of the road vary in style and design, have generously proportioned front gardens and are mostly well separated from one another. The space between the street and the dwellings, the gaps between some of the buildings, and the predominance of greenery over built form, give the area a semi-rural character and appearance.
10. The appeal site is one of the larger plots in the street, but is occupied by one of the smaller houses. The house is sited further back from the road than its neighbour, Tree Tops. It therefore has a particularly large front garden which has a more open character than others in the vicinity. The proposal would subdivide the plot into three. They would vary in width from 12-18m and would each be in excess of 100m long. The proposed dwellings would be on that part of the site which is within the village boundary. The gardens would be almost entirely within the countryside. The three dwellings would have nearly identical footprints, all of them larger than that of the existing dwelling. They would be arranged in a staggered linear form such that the front elevation of the dwelling on Plot 1 would align with the rear elevation of Tree Tops.
11. The dwellings would be very similar to one another in terms of scale. They would be significantly deeper than they would be wide. Their two full storey heights would be taller than the dwelling they would replace. The hipped roof form shown on the illustrative drawing could somewhat reduce their overall bulk. Nevertheless, the proposal would represent a substantial increase in the amount of development on the site. From the street the houses would be seen as a single group of almost identical dwellings with gaps between them that would be more typical of a suburban form of development. The combination of their uniform scale and height, their proximity to each other, and their relationship to the street would be out of keeping with the more varied, spacious and open character of the surrounding area.

12. The presence of large double car ports between the road and the houses on Plots 2 and 3, would intrude into the space in front of the dwellings, partially obscuring their front elevations. This would be untypical of the western side of Aldworth Road where outbuildings and garages are predominantly to the side of the existing properties, even when located within the frontage. The need to provide driveways and turning areas for each house would introduce significant additional areas of hard-surfacing. The creation of a second access to serve the site would result in the loss of a short section of the boundary hedge. All these changes would introduce urbanising features to the detriment of this semi-rural area. It would be the consequential loss of openness, rather than the loss of any public view towards the countryside of the AONB beyond the rear of the existing house, that would be harmful.
13. The appeal site is on slightly higher ground than the surrounding countryside, which falls away to the south. Views towards the proposal from the footpath to the east (BAS/16/1) would be limited as this passes through a wooded area. Similarly, views of the site from Ashampstead Road are restricted by the vegetation which encloses most of that rural lane. Nevertheless, the creation of three long, narrow gardens, with the inevitable introduction of additional boundary treatments and other domestic paraphernalia, would represent an encroachment into the AONB. This would be harmful to its undeveloped character, even though the development would not be highly visible from the surrounding roads and footpaths.
14. In my view this part of Aldworth Road forms an important transitional area between Upper Basildon and the countryside of the AONB to the west. It is therefore particularly sensitive to change and a proposal for development on the appeal site cannot be compared with existing development on the eastern side of the street or elsewhere in the village. The proposal for three detached houses, in close proximity to each other and the street, together with the associated car ports, driveways and additional access would erode the open, semi-rural appearance of the area and adversely affect the character of Aldworth Road.
15. Taking all these factors into consideration I conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area and the North Wessex Downs AONB. The scheme would fail to comply with Policies CS4, CS14, CS19 and ADPP5 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy. These policies, amongst other things, require new development to respect its context and contribute positively to local distinctiveness and sense of place, especially where a scheme would affect the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB.
16. For this reason, and having regard to all other relevant matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR