



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 October 2019

by A Denby BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 December 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/19/3232761

Burford, Stanford Road, Bradfield Southend, Reading RG7 6HL

- 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 Miss B Earland against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00778/OUTD, dated 19 March 2019, was refused by notice dated 26 June 2019.
 - The development proposed is the construction of a one and a half storey dwelling with a detached garage at land to the rear of Burford Cottage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. Outline planning permission is sought but with access and layout to be considered at this stage. I have therefore determined the appeal on this basis.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the location of the site is suitable for residential development in the context of local and national policy;and the effect of the proposed development on:
 - the character and appearance of the surrounding area, with particular regard to its location within the AONB; and
 - highway and pedestrian safety, with particular regard to visibility.

Reasons

Location of development

4. Policies ADPP1, ADPP5, CS1 and CS13 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy, 2012 (CS) set out a spatial strategy which promotes development on appropriate land within or immediately adjacent to the urban areas, rural service centre and service villages and ensure that growth is sustainable and conserves and enhances the special landscape qualities of the AONB. Policy C1 of the West Berkshire: Housing Site Allocation DPD, 2017 (HSA) states that there is a presumption against new residential development outside settlement boundaries unless certain exceptions apply. The site is not located within, or

adjacent to, a defined settlement and the proposals do not achieve the exception criteria as set out in Policy C1 of the HSA.

5. There is existing development in the vicinity of the site which follows a linear pattern along Cock Lane. However, the appeal scheme, being set behind these existing dwellings, would be at odds with this established pattern of development. Whilst there is a slight stagger in the siting of buildings along Cock Lane, with those to the west of Green Lane being set slightly further back, there is still a very clear linear pattern to the existing development.
6. The appeal scheme, rather than fitting in with this, would introduce another line of development and extend the frontage along Green Lane. It would be detached from the predominant linear arrangement of development in the vicinity. As such the site could not be considered to be within the existing cluster of development, nor constitute infilling within an otherwise built-up frontage. It is noted that the plot size and spacing would be similar to adjacent properties. However, the appeal scheme would not respect the rural character and streetscene of the locality as it would extend development further into the countryside, eroding its current character and appearance.
7. Furthermore, there is no evidence before me that there are local facilities or amenities close by, or that the site is well served by public transport. On the basis of the evidence, residents would have limited option other than to rely on the private car for their daily needs and this limits the accessibility of the location.
8. There are no exceptional circumstances put forward to warrant the location of additional residential development in this site and consequently, the proposed development would result in an additional dwelling situated in the countryside which would conflict with CS Policies ADPP1, ADPP5, CS1 and CS13; HAS Policy C1 and the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework, which seek to direct new development to existing settlements and to protect the countryside.

Character and appearance

9. The wider landscape around the site is typically open agricultural fields, interspersed with woodland and mature landscaping. The appeal site lies within the AONB which is characterised by the quality of its chalk landscape and a high sensitivity to change. The varied rural settlements are a key component of the landscape, with physical distinction between places, and clear settlement patterns which show the evolution of the settlements and wider area.
10. The site is set back from the main road behind an existing linear arrangement of development. It would be accessed via an existing single width track that currently provides access to Burford, and stables to the north. The site itself is grassed with one small tree present and there is mature hedging to Green Lane with the rest of the site being enclosed by low level post and rail fencing.
11. Although the site is currently fenced off from both the residential garden of Burford and the existing stables and, the nature of its use is not agreed between the parties, visually it forms part of the open countryside, retaining a rural character and appearance.
12. Burford is the only property accessed from this section of Green Lane, and there is significant separation between the site and any development further north. Green Lane is predominately unsurfaced and narrows substantially to

- the north of the site. Considering its low level of usage and existing landscaping it has a tranquil and rural character, reflective of the appeal site.
13. The appeal scheme, although adjacent to existing development, would be at odds with the established pattern and character of development. It would result in the creep of built development further into the countryside. This would have an urbanising impact, which would harm the sense of remoteness and tranquillity associated with the AONB and would not be appropriate in terms of the existing settlement form and pattern. Even though wider views of the site would be limited, it would nonetheless fail to enhance the character and appearance of the local area and erode the physical linear distinction of the existing development and its relationship to nearby settlements.
 14. It is noted that the proposed footprint and indicative height and design of the dwelling would be comparable to existing dwellings in the vicinity. However, this would not overcome the harm I have identified to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
 15. In determining the appeal, I have had regard to the duty under section 85(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This requires that decisions have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB, a designation which is afforded one of the highest levels of protection and to which I must attribute significant weight. As detailed above the proposals would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Framework, relating to the conservation and enhancement of AONBs, I must give the harm to the AONB significant weight.
 16. For the reasons given above the development would conflict with Policies ADPP5, and CS19 of the CS; HAS Policy C1, and the aims of the Framework which seek to direct new development to existing settlements, ensure that developments respect and enhance the character and appearance of the area, contribute positively to local distinctiveness and sense of place, and ensure the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character is conserved and enhanced.

Highway Safety

17. The submitted plans show that access from the site would be from Cock Lane via Green Lane. Whilst Green Lane appears to have relatively low usage by vehicular traffic, Cock lane is subject to the national speed limit and I saw on my site visit that it is more heavily trafficked.
18. Visibility for vehicles entering or exiting Green Lane is restricted due to its narrow width and the proximity of mature landscaping to the highway, both on Green Lane and along the Cock Lane frontage. Consequently, vehicles exiting Green Lane would need to edge out on to Cock Lane in order to gain adequate visibility. Although Cock Lane permits two-way traffic it is narrow and so any vehicles edging out from Green Lane would do so straight in to the path of oncoming traffic.
19. Due to its position, height and thickness, the existing landscaping offers little opportunity for motorists or cyclists, using Cock Lane or Green Lane, to be aware of the others presence in advance. These users would only become

aware of one another at, or close to, a point of conflict and this would be to the detriment of highway safety.

20. Whilst the status of Green Lane is unclear, the appeal scheme would result in an increased use of the access and this could in turn result in an increase in conflicts. There is little detail within the evidence before me to demonstrate that the existing frequency of use of Green Lane is such that the proposal would only marginally increase it, similarly, it has not been demonstrated that adequate visibility could be achieved to mitigate any harm resulting from increased use.
21. On the basis of the above, the proposal has failed to demonstrate that a safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users or that any impacts on highway safety can be mitigated. CS Policy CS13 appears to relate to more strategic highway matters and therefore I do not find conflict with that Policy. However due to a lack of information the proposals have failed to demonstrate they would not have an unacceptable impact on highway safety in accordance with Paragraphs 108-110 of the Framework which seek to ensure developments provide safe, suitable access and minimise the scope for conflicts between cyclists and vehicles.

Other Matter

22. The appellant has referred to a previous approval for a dwelling at Poltava, which is located to the west of Green Lane. From the details submitted it is evident that there are distinct differences between that site and the appeal site. That proposed dwelling would sit adjacent Poltava and be accessed from Cock Lane. Therefore, whilst it would extend slightly further to the rear than the existing dwelling it would still be very much viewed as part of the strong linear pattern of development along Cock Lane. I therefore do not consider this development to be directly comparable to the appeal site or scheme. Therefore, this other matter does not, therefore, lead me to a different conclusion.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A Denby

INSPECTOR