
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 January 2020

by Rachael Pipkin, BA (Hons), MPhil, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29th January 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/H2265/W/19/3238322

Land south of Shrubshall Meadow, Longmill Lane, Plaxtol, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN15 0RQ

- 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 A Boakes of Andrew Boakes Assoc against the decision of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.
 - The application Ref: TM/2019/01281/FL dated 30 May 2019, was refused by notice dated 1 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is a detached dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is within the settlement boundary of Plaxtol, a rural village located in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The village comprises two main clusters of development, the older part of the village at the western end of The Street, focussed around Church Hill and School Lane, and the more recent development along Long Mill Lane to the east. The appeal site is located on the edge of the village at the rear of properties fronting Long Mill Lane. This eastern part of the village is characterised by properties in a range of ages and styles, with properties set out in linear patterns of development along the main roads interspersed with small cul-de-sac developments and a looser pattern of development.
4. The appeal site is formed of an accessway and an undeveloped, rectangular plot of land. The accessway extends from Long Mill Lane through a small cul-de-sac housing development at Shrubshall Meadow to a gate leading to a narrow, partially surfaced track running behind Numbers 12-15 Shrubshall Meadow and the long rear gardens of four houses on Long Mill Lane. These gardens enclose the main part of the appeal site on three sides with a field within the open countryside to the east on the remaining boundary, with the River Bourne beyond. This part of the site has a semi-natural character overgrown with young trees, brambles and other vegetation. A large oak tree is located at the corner of the site which is protected by a Tree Preservation

- Order. Beyond the garden of Brookfields, which fronts Long Mill Lane, there is a small cul-de-sac development of houses off Brook Lane.
5. The proposed development would be a detached, contemporary designed L-shaped building with accommodation set over two floors with the first-floor accommodation set within the roof space. The roofs of the building would be mono-pitched, green roofs planted with sedum.
 6. Paragraph 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out that developments should function well and add to the overall quality of the area and establish a sense of place. The proposed house would be within the village boundary. However, due to its long access through a cul-de-sac and along a path to the rear of gardens to properties fronting Long Mill Lane, it would be unconnected to and separate from surrounding development. It would have no shared street frontage with any other property and, due to its out-of-the-way position on the edge of the village, it would fail to function as part of the village, providing few opportunities for social interactions. Moreover, the excessive length of the driveway would not encourage pedestrian and cycle access to the village and services, particularly during the evening when the access would be unlit and less easy to navigate.
 7. Due to its position tucked away behind Long Mill Lane, the proposed house would not form part of or relate to any linear development, characteristic of development along the main roads through the village. As such, whilst not visible in the context of the linear pattern of development, it would be at odds with it, and would fail to help to establish a sense of place using the existing arrangement of streets. Whilst there are other examples of non-linear development within the village, such as the cul-de-sac developments off the main roads, these are nevertheless small developments serving more than one house. The proposed development would not be a comparable form of development.
 8. The proposed house would be visible from a limited number of public viewpoints along Brook Lane where it would be partially screened by the boundary hedge of Brookfields and the existing vegetation, including the large protected oak tree, along the site's eastern boundary and the vegetation along the banks of the River Bourne. Whilst not visually prominent, it would nevertheless be visible and introduce a more urban form of development and a harder edge to the village away from any established streets. There is some harm to character and appearance arising from this.
 9. The contemporary design of the proposed house with green roofs, would be unlike surrounding properties. However, this part of the village contains a range of properties of varying ages and styles and there is no prevailing style. In this context, the contemporary design of the proposal would not be harmful.
 10. I have been referred to a dismissed appeal at Ringlestone, The Street, Plaxtol¹ where a development of 3 houses was found to be harmful to the character and appearance of a garden zone and the distinctly linear pattern of development in that part of the village. I do not have the full details of that scheme before me, however, I note that it related to a larger proposed development. Whilst I do not find that appeal to be directly comparable to the proposal before me, I

¹ APP/H2265/W/18/3219133

nevertheless find that the appeal proposal would similarly jar in its local context as it would fail to relate to the surrounding pattern of development.

11. I accept that the proposed house, being within the village boundary and partially screened by trees, would not give rise to any unacceptable harm to the landscape or scenic beauty of the AONB designation.
12. The proposed development would fail to integrate both visually and functionally with the village. This leads me to conclude that the proposed development would significantly harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It would therefore conflict with Policy CP24 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Core Strategy 2007 and Policy SQ1 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Managing Development and the Environment Development Plan Document 2010. These policies, together and amongst other things, require development to be a high quality of design, that respects local distinctiveness, and does not harm the functioning of the settlement. It would also not accord with the place-making objectives of the Framework.

Other Matters

13. The appellant has indicated that the development would likely be developed as a self-build and would make a contribution to local demand for self-build plots. However, I have no evidence that the proposed scheme would be developed in this way. I have therefore given this very limited weight in my decision.

Planning Balance

14. The Government is seeking to significantly boost the supply of housing and the Council accepts that it is not able to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites.
15. A single, detached dwelling would make a minimal contribution to the supply of housing. The proposal would also make a small contribution in supporting local infrastructure and facilities through the New Homes Bonus. In addition, there would be small social and economic benefits associated with its construction and occupation. However, I have found that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. This environmental harm is a matter which carries significant weight in the balance.
16. This leads me to conclude that the adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. The presumption in favour of sustainable development therefore does not apply in this case.

Conclusion

17. I have found the proposal would be contrary to the development plan. There are no other considerations that outweigh that conflict and for this reason, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Rachael Pipkin

INSPECTOR