
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 March 2020

by Stuart Willis BA Hons MSc PGCE MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/D0121/W/19/3243543

1 Warren Lane, Long Ashton BS41 9DA

- 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 Sam Jones of SOVUX Developments Ltd against the decision of North Somerset Council.
 - The application Ref 19/P/1045/FUL, dated 26 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 31 October 2019.
 - The development proposed is erection of 4no. detached houses, with associated access driveway, bin store and landscaping, within an existing large garden site.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

3. There is no consistent architectural style, materials and density of development in Long Ashton. Nonetheless, the appeal site comprises a large part of the garden area for one of a relatively low-density pair of semi-detached bungalows. There are large areas of open and undeveloped land both within their plots and beyond their boundaries.
4. Although unremarkable in themselves, the low height and loose grain of the existing bungalows allows generally unobstructed views to and from the adjacent countryside. Looking towards the settlement the openness and greenery at the site blends with the adjacent fields and landscaping at the corner of Warren Lane and Weston Road. This creates a gradual introduction to the built form, that along with landscape features, provides a verdant appearance to this part of the village edge. In contrast, there is bulkier and more dominant built form seen on the opposite side of the road at the Apple Tree Nursery (the Nursery).
5. Most development nearby is 2-storey in height with pitched roofs and the design of the proposed dwellings have taken some cues from the Nursery. Nevertheless, the design and scale of the proposed properties are in contrast to the semi-detached properties they are closest to and those along Warren Lane. While there would be varied roof profiles and stepped elements, the appeal

scheme would introduce development of a far greater height and mass than currently at the site. The variation in the scale, materials and design between the existing and proposed properties in such close proximity to each other would be jarring. While a condition could be imposed, were the appeal to be allowed regarding the external materials, this would not overcome my concerns.

6. There are examples of properties close to the road along Weston Road including the Nursery. Furthermore, the proposed dwellings would be set in from the boundaries of the site to some degree behind garden areas. Notwithstanding this, the proposed built form would be considerably nearer to the rear and Weston Road boundaries of the site than the existing bungalow. Rather than creating symmetry with the Nursery, the scheme would result in a more abrupt and confused cluster of developed. This would erode the existing openness at this edge of the settlement.
7. There are similar densities and plot sizes at modern developments in the village and the site is within the settlement boundary. Moreover, there is no policy requirement for development to be stepped down or of a lower density towards the edge of settlements. Nonetheless, the scheme would appear incongruous with, and not reflect the loose grain or spacing of, the site's immediate context. Consequently, despite the Council not raising concerns over the size of amenity space or separation distances, it would appear cramped in comparison to the existing layout.
8. The courtyard layout and staggering of building lines may be reminiscent of a farmyard configuration. Nonetheless, it does not reflect the existing site or any nearby locations in a similar edge of settlement position. It would result in an incoherent pattern of development when viewed against the semi-detached bungalows that would remain. While the existing drive would be re-used in part, the greater level of hardstanding would contribute to the loss of greenery and increase the urbanising of the site.
9. Trees are retained along with the boundary wall and further planting could be subject to conditions were the appeal allowed. However, the site is in a prominent location. The discordance of the dwellings with their immediate context would be accentuated by their position close to Weston Road, high eaves and the land levels of the site. While the presence of dwellings would not be unexpected, the incongruity of the scheme would be readily apparent in short- and long-range views from within the village and on the approach to it.
10. My attention has been drawn to other properties at the edge of, and within, the settlement including at the Long Ashton Research Station site. There are properties that share elements of the appeal scheme in terms of the layout and built form. Nonetheless, the appeal proposal would not be seen with these. It would be seen with the much lower built form of the existing semi-detached properties and their spacious plots. Moreover, the examples highlighted often formed part of a streetscene with a greater consistency and were not as prominent in long range views as the appeal site. Therefore, they are materially different to the appeal site and scheme.
11. As such, the proposal would cause considerable harm to the character and appearance of the area. Therefore, the scheme would be contrary to Policies CS12 of the North Somerset Council Core Strategy, Policies DM32, DM36 and DM37 of the North Somerset Council Development Management Policies Sites

and Policies Plan Part 1, Policy LHN 2 of Long Ashton Neighbourhood Development Plan 2013 – 2033 and the North Somerset Council Landscape Character Area SPD. These, in part, seek to ensure development is sensitive to, retain and enhance the local character, and their setting with layouts that respect the existing streetscene with a design, form and scale that is in keeping with the area.

12. The Supplementary Planning Document Residential Design Guide – Section 2 is included in the reasons for refusal. However, as the element of the scheme that I consider to be harmful is not related to the works to the existing property, this weighs neither for nor against the appeal proposal.

Other Matters

13. I appreciate that the appellant has amended the scheme in an attempt to overcome concerns raised by the Council. Nevertheless, I have assessed the scheme on its own merits.

Planning Balance

14. The Council have acknowledged that they are currently unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing land. Therefore, the presumption in favour of sustainable development outlined in Paragraph 11d)ii of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) is engaged.
15. The proposal would align with the aims of the Framework to significantly boost the supply of housing and that small-scale developments can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement and different types of need. It also encourages the optimal use of sites where there is a shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs. Taking the appellant's figures for the degree of shortfall, I give the contribution towards housing supply and mix moderate weight.
16. There would be benefits to the local economy arising from the construction period and future spend of occupants giving support to the local services and facilities. Moreover, the site would be accessible to public transport, services and facilities. These factors weigh in favour of the scheme. However, given the number of units proposed, they attract limited weight.
17. The Council have not included refusal reasons in relation to living conditions of future and existing residents, drainage, flooding or highway matters. Nevertheless, the absence of identified harm is a neutral factor.
18. I have found that the appeal scheme would cause considerable harm to the character and appearance of the area. Therefore, it would fail to accord with the Framework where it states that development should be sympathetic to local character. I afford this conflict substantial weight. Consequently, the adverse impacts of the development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole.

Conclusion

19. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications for planning permission, and therefore appeals, must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. I have found that the appeal scheme would

conflict with development plan policies and the Framework as it would result in considerable harm to the character and appearance of the area. Even when taken cumulatively, the other material considerations do not outweigh this.

20. Therefore, for the reasons given above and having regard to all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Stuart Willis

INSPECTOR