Appeal Decision

Hearing Held on 14 & 15 January 2020 Site visit made on 15 January 2020

by S J Lee BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30th April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/R3705/W/19/3234056 Land East of Islington Farm, Tamworth Road, Wood End, Warwickshire

- 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 Summix IFW Developments Ltd against the decision of North Warwickshire Borough Council.
- The application Ref PAP/2018/0762, dated 11 December 2018, was refused by notice dated 9 July 2019.
- The development proposed is residential development (Class C3) with associated access, landscaping, open space and drainage infrastructure, with all matters reserved save access.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

- 2. The application was made in outline with all matters reserved apart from access. I have considered the appeal on this basis and treated all plans, apart from those identifying the access, as indicative only. The evidence suggests that the development would provide up to 145 dwellings. While mindful the application is in outline only, this provides a useful guide to consider the effects of the development.
- 3. A signed and dated S106 agreement was produced at the hearing. This includes an obligation to provide up to 50% affordable housing. It also requires the developer to make financial contributions towards the provision of sustainable travel packs, improvements to public rights of way and a bus stop, police services, youth provision, off-site leisure and healthcare. I shall return to this matter below.

Main Issues

- 4. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - Whether the Council can demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land;
 - Whether the location of development is acceptable having regard to relevant development plan and national planning policies; and
 - The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Housing land supply

- 5. At the time of the original decision, the Council accepted that it could not demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing land as required by paragraph 73 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). This would therefore have triggered paragraph 11d of the Framework and the so-called 'tilted balance'. However, updated monitoring evidence has led the Council to conclude that it now has a five year supply.
- 6. The revised evidence was based on the position as at 31 March 2019, the most up-to-date evidence available at the time of the hearing. The main parties based their assessment of the five year supply on the housing requirement set out in the emerging North Warwickshire Local Plan (eNWLP). This plan is currently under examination.
- 7. Paragraph 73 states that the supply of deliverable sites should be considered against the housing requirement as set out in adopted strategic policies or against the 'local housing need' (LHN), where the strategic policies are more than five years old. The North Warwickshire Core Strategy (NWCS) was adopted in October 2014 and is thus more than five years old. No evidence was submitted to suggest the Council has reviewed these strategic policies and found them not to require updating. The Framework is therefore clear that the five year housing requirement should be based on the Council's LHN. There is no provision in the Framework for the use of an emerging plan's housing requirement figure.
- 8. I acknowledge that the eNWLP is a material consideration in relation to this appeal. The eNWLP requirement is based on the most recent housing needs assessment and includes the Council's intention to include an element of neighbouring authorities' housing needs into their requirement. The LHN figure does not reflect these factors and is lower than the eNWLP figure.
- 9. However, the examination into the eNWLP is currently paused pending the outcome of a Housing Infrastructure Fund bid. There are currently no dates for the resumption of the examination, the adoption of the plan or any certainty that it will be adopted in its current form. Therefore, having regard to paragraph 48 of the Framework, I am unable to give significant weight to the housing requirement in the eNWLP. I have therefore assessed the housing requirement on the basis of the Council's LHN.
- 10. The parties agree that the LHN requirement would be 865 dwellings over the 2019 to 2024 period and that a 5% buffer should be used. On the basis of the submitted evidence I share this view. On this basis, the overall requirement would be 908 dwellings. The Council consider that it has a deliverable supply of 2041 dwellings. The appellant argues that the more appropriate figure to use is 1157. Both figures exceed the LHN requirement and would equate to either a 11.24 or 6.37 year supply respectively.
- 11. The actual level of 'deliverable' housing land is likely to lie somewhere between the parties' two figures. Nonetheless, based on the evidence before me, the Council's assumptions on what might be considered deliverable at this time appear somewhat optimistic. Its supply includes a number of sites that are identified in the eNWLP, but which do not have planning permission. While I do

not share the appellant's view that such sites should be excluded from consideration in principle, to be considered 'deliverable' there must be clear evidence that there will be delivery within five years. The Council is clearly in discussion with developers on a number of these sites, but this does not necessarily translate to 'clear' evidence of delivery. Assertions that there are no reasons why development *cannot* happen, is not clear evidence that it *will* happen. For the majority of sites in dispute, there was no documentary evidence from the developers in question of their intentions or any agreements in relation to the submission of planning applications and/or delivery. Evidence on likely lead-in times for dealing with outstanding issues, including going through the process of outline permission, reserved matters and the discharge of conditions was also vague.

12. As I have determined the Council has a five year supply, it is not necessary for me to definitively conclude on what the deliverable housing land supply figure is. However, in considering the planning balance, the deliverable supply is likely to be closer to that set out by the appellant. Even on the basis of the appellant's much lower figure, the Council is able to demonstrate in excess of a five year supply of deliverable housing land. Paragraph 11d is therefore not triggered on this basis.

Policy and location

- 13. Policy NW2 of the NWCS establishes a settlement hierarchy. This sets out the expectation that more than 50% of the area's housing and employment requirements would be provided in the Market Towns of Atherstone, Polesworth and Dordon. It also states that development for housing and employment will be permitted within the development boundary of Coleshill. Within 'Local Service Centres' development that is appropriate to their place in the settlement hierarchy will be permitted within or adjacent to the development boundaries.
- 14. In 'Category 4' settlements, such as Wood End, development will be limited to that identified in the NWCS or a Neighbourhood Plan. The policy also states that development will not be supported outside the current development boundaries of 'Green Belt' settlements. Although the site itself is not in the Green Belt, Wood End is identified as a 'Green Belt' settlement in the Plan and thus the policy restricts development outside its defined boundary. The appeal site is not allocated for development in the NWCS and there is no Neighbourhood Plan in place. The development would therefore be contrary to the provisions of Policy NW2.
- 15. Policy NW5 specifies how the housing requirement will be allocated across the District. In terms of Wood End, this identifies a minimum of 30 units in the village. For all Category 4 locations, the policy states that development will usually take place on sites of no more than 10 units. The supporting text suggests this limitation is to allow smaller settlements to grow organically. The wording of the policy does not necessarily preclude development of more than 30 dwellings within the village on sites larger than 10 dwellings. Reading this in conjunction with Policy NW2, it is clear that development would be expected to take place within the settlement boundary. As the site lies outside the settlement, it is of limited relevance in terms of the development. The policy does however give some indication of the Council's approach to villages of this type.

- 16. The eNWLP proposes to alter the settlement boundary to accommodate an allocation of 28 dwellings on part of the appeal site. Nevertheless, the Council consider the scale of development proposed would be too large for a settlement of the size and would not be commensurate with the 'organic growth' promoted in the NWCS. Assuming around 145 dwellings, the development would equate to a 22% increase in the number of dwellings in the village. This would represent a significant increase in the size of the village in a short period of time. Notwithstanding the wording of Policy NW5, when considered in the round, I conclude that the NWCS does not envisage development of this scale in or around Wood End.
- 17. A Secretary of State (SoS) decision¹ has been drawn to my attention, which relates to the weight to be given to these policies. The conclusion reached in that decision was that Policy NW2 was out-of-date. This was based on the fact that housing and employment needs would be unlikely to be met within existing settlement boundaries and thus these could not be relied upon. The Inspector's Report states that while it does not mean the policies should be given no weight, they must come with a 'health warning' which results in limited weight being ascribed to them. Nevertheless, the SoS concluded that the 'tilted balance' had been triggered as a result. My attention has been drawn to another appeal decision where the Inspector concurred with this approach². I shall return to this issue in the planning balance below.
- 18. However, references to settlement boundaries are only one element of this policy. Its main purpose is to set out the settlement hierarchy and the broad distribution of growth across the borough. There is also no reason to conclude that the Council should not continue to have regard to the location of development and its underlying strategy in determining applications. The policy sets out the expectation that the majority of development will be directed to those locations with the highest levels of services, facilities and employment provision. This does not preclude development in lower order settlements, which can help meet local needs and maintain or enhance their vitality. I see no particular inconsistency with this approach and that set out in paragraph 78 of the Framework. This would also accord with the Framework's objectives, as set out in paragraphs 102 and 103, of guiding significant development to where travel choices are increased and the need to travel reduced. These aims remain desirable and thus the policy retains a high degree of consistency with the Framework. On this basis, I am not convinced the references to development outside development boundaries should render it completely out-of-date.
- 19. With regard to national policy, the village contains some services and facilities that can meet some of the everyday needs of local residents, including a primary school, small convenience store, village hall and a recreation ground. Some travel outside Wood End would be inevitable to meet many day-to-day needs, including trips to secondary school, higher order shopping trips, healthcare and work. There are some bus services available through the village, with a stop close to the site access on Tamworth Road. From discussions at the hearing, it does not appear that the timing or regularity of the buses would be convenient for regular commuting to and from work. There are large industrial estates relatively near to the village, which cater for a large

¹ Appeal reference: APP/R3705/W/16/3149827

² Appeal reference: APP/R3705/W/17/3189584

- and increasing number of jobs. While it is likely that any trips to these locations would be by car, the trip lengths involved would not be excessive.
- 20. The village would provide some opportunities to travel by alternatives to the car. The development would also help to maintain the vitality of the existing services within the village. These factors weigh in favour of the proposal to an extent. Nevertheless, this represents a large development in relation to the existing scale of the village, its place in the settlement hierarchy and the facilities it contains. The number of additional car-based trips is likely to be quite high. Even if these are to local services or employment centres, this would not be consistent with the spatial strategy set out in the NWCS. I am also not persuaded that proposed mitigation measures would lead to a material increase in walking, cycling or public transport use. Although the Framework recognises there will be differences between urban and rural areas in maximising sustainable transport options, I still consider the development would be inconsistent with the requirements of paragraph 103 of the Framework.
- 21. In conclusion on this matter, I find that the development would clearly conflict with NWCS Policy NW2, which seeks to focus development into the most accessible and sustainable locations. The scale of development envisaged would also lead to a significant number of car-based trips, contrary to the provisions of the Framework.
- 22. In coming to this conclusion, I recognise that the emerging plan already identifies the village for some growth. There would therefore be some likely increase in car use as a result. However, the difference in scale is such that the impact and harm caused by the development would far exceed that resulting from the proposed allocation.
- 23. The appellant drew my attention to another Category 4 village where the eNWLP is allocating a larger amount of development than proposed here. There is likely to be some variability between what might be considered acceptable in different villages and thus what is acceptable in one does not mean the same scale of growth is acceptable in all. There is no detailed evidence before me relating to the relative size of the settlements or service provision or the circumstances in which the allocations have been made. Accordingly, I cannot conclude with certainty that the situation between the two settlements are entirely comparable. In any event, in considering the specifics of this case, I do not consider the development is consistent with the spatial strategy within the NWCS or the Framework.

Character and appearance

24. The appeal site is made up of part of a large open agricultural field, smaller paddocks, an existing dwelling that would be demolished to provide the main access and a farm track. There is no physical boundary to the east of the site, which runs roughly through the middle of the main field. The site is bounded to the north by Boulters Lane and the rear gardens of Silver Bren and Stonehouse. To the west and south, the site largely abuts existing dwellings of the village. There are a significant number of hedgerows and trees within and bordering the site, including either side of the farm track. This is particularly the case in relation to the paddocks on the western part of the site. A public right of way (PROW) between Tamworth Road and Boulters Lane cuts through the main field to the east of the site.

- 25. The introduction of housing across the site would inevitably have a very significant effect on the existing character and appearance of the site and the edge of the village. Although there is housing on three sides of the site, the development would discernibly erode the rural edge of the village and represent a substantial urbanising encroachment into the countryside. Notwithstanding the appellant's assertions, the site does not feel enclosed or integral to the village when within it. The size of the site, the open aspect to the east, the slightly elevated and exposed position of parts of the site and the extent, scale and coverage of the vegetated boundaries, all provide an impression of being both in the open countryside and somewhat disconnected from the village proper. This impression is not as strong within the paddocks, which are physically closer to the main built form of the village. Nevertheless, their largely open and verdant nature still provide a pleasant transition between the village and open countryside.
- 26. Although layout is a reserved matter, the position of the access and the requirement for internal distribution roads means there would inevitably be some loss of trees and hedgerows across the site, but most significantly around the paddocks and farm track. Collectively, the trees and hedgerows make a positive contribution to the visual amenity of the area. Any loss would be unfortunate. Although the illustrative masterplans indicate how some existing features could be retained, losses would still occur. This would be detrimental both from a visual perspective and in relation to the field pattern and farm track which forms part of this area's existing character.
- 27. The site would have one vehicular access that would run between two dwellings on Tamworth Road. While the housing here would screen the development from the roadside, the access arrangements and position behind existing housing would mean that the development would appear and function as a relatively large self-enclosed and poorly integrated estate. Essentially, it would be a disjointed and awkward bolt-on to the village. I do not consider this can be considered good practice in the context of the Government's drive toward good design and well-functioning settlements. The overall scale of development in relation to what currently exists would emphasise the harm caused by this and would not reflect the more gradual historic growth of the village.
- 28. The illustrative masterplan places a large green buffer zone and open space at the eastern extent of the site. While this might provide a degree of screening, the peripheral location of the space means it would not function well as either open space for either the estate itself or for the village as a whole. In my view, this would exacerbate the lack of any proper physical or functional integration between the development and the village proper. The proposed provision of pedestrian links between Tamworth Road and Boulters Lane, which would largely replicate what already exists, do not alter my views on this.
- 29. Moreover, the layout in the illustrative plans would not reflect the largely linear nature of development in the rest of the village. There are some cul-de-sacs and estates off the main roads, but these are generally much smaller than what is proposed here and do not take their accesses through gaps in existing rows of housing. Here, the estate would spread for some distance from the main access, leading to a number of dead ends and turning heads. This would not reflect the nature of the majority of the existing settlement or represent a good standard of design and layout.

- 30. I recognise that the application was made in outline and layout and design are reserved matters. Nevertheless, in granting permission I would need to be satisfied that a satisfactory form of development would be achievable. The illustrative material produced does not provide sufficient comfort that this would be possible.
- 31. The appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) concludes that the development would result in a 'limited' change at the localised level with only a limited number of views where the development would be visible. From some of these views, the LVIA accepts the effects would have a moderate or major adverse impact in the short term. The most significant impact would be on residents bordering the site, occupants of the nearby caravan park and users of the PROW. The significant scale of encroachment and urbanisation of the site would be highly prominent from these locations. The development would also be prominent from parts of Boulters Lane. Again, the loosely knit detached dwellings here create a distinct 'end' point to the village. Although the masterplan suggests there would be no housing on the Boulters Lane frontage, any housing to the rear would still be discernible. The likely density of such housing here would be uncharacteristic of this part of the village, thus adding to the likely harm.
- 32. The screening from existing buildings, mature landscaping and topography means that medium and long-distance views of the site would be limited. Nevertheless, there would still be significant impact on views from publicly accessible locations. That these effects diminish with distance from the site does not mean that they are not important.
- 33. The LVIA also concludes that the site and its immediate context is of low to medium landscape value. It also concludes that the overall impact on landscape character would be medium to low impact in the short term, reducing to a negligible to minor adverse effect once mitigation measures have been implemented and given time to mature. I consider the area around the paddocks and track, which also include trees that can be seen for some distance, is of a higher level of sensitivity than may have been suggested by the report. Nevertheless, I recognise that the site as a whole is not within any defined landscape designations. The main field is also not an unusual feature in the wider landscape and, notwithstanding the mature landscaping, does not appear to be of any particular importance. I acknowledge therefore that the impact on landscape value would therefore not be as significant as the visual impact and effect on the immediate character of the settlement.
- 34. The appellant has placed great weight on the potential for additional landscaping to mitigate the impacts. The potential to provide additional screening would be likely to reduce some of the visual impacts over time, particularly from the PROW and Boulters Lane. Nevertheless, it would be unlikely to fully address visual impacts, particularly during the winter months. It also would not alter the poor integration with the rest of the village or the discordant nature of the development's scale and potential layout. While landscaping may provide a degree of compensation for the mature trees and hedgerows that would inevitably be lost, it is unlikely that the existing field pattern, particularly in terms of the paddocks, would be replicated. This mitigation would also take some time to mature and have any effect. I am not therefore persuaded that additional landscaping would be sufficient to address the harm caused by the development.

- 35. Notwithstanding my conclusions on landscape value, I find that the development would result in material harm to the character and appearance of the area. Accordingly, there would be conflict with NWCS Policy NW12 which seeks, amongst other things, to ensure that development demonstrates a high quality of design that positively improves a settlement's character. There would also be conflict with paragraph 127 of the Framework which seeks to ensure, amongst other things, that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area.
- 36. In coming to this conclusion, I have had regard to the allocation of part of the site in the eNWLP and the likely use of the same access arrangements. However, the appeal proposal is many times larger than what is proposed in the emerging plan and thus the impact on local character is likely to be very different. The allocation does not therefore alter my view that the development would result in unacceptable harm.

Planning Obligation

- 37. I have considered the S106 Agreement in line with Regulation 122(2) of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 and paragraph 56 of the Framework. These state that planning obligations must only be sought where they are necessary to make development acceptable in planning terms, are directly related to the development and are fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.
- 38. The S106 would secure the delivery of 50% affordable housing on the site. Assuming a scheme of 145 units, the obligation would therefore provide up to 73 affordable homes. NWCS Policy NW6 requires provision of 40% of affordable dwellings on sites of this size and location. The obligation would therefore meet the policy requirement.
- 39. Detailed correspondence outlining the requirements from the increased population for healthcare and policing was submitted by the relevant bodies in relation to the original application. I have noted the concerns of local residents relating to the specific GP surgery to which one contribution is sought. Nevertheless, this has been based on information from the County Council and I am satisfied that the Polesworth and Dordon Group Practice would be an acceptable location for contributions to be spent.
- 40. The agreement secures financial contributions to improvements to public rights of way within 1.5 miles of the site, improvements to the bus stop on Tamworth Road and the provision of 'sustainable travel packs' for new residents. No new public transport provision is proposed, and the 'travel packs' would appear to provide information only. It is unlikely that such measures would mitigate fully for the additional car use. Nevertheless, when considering the rural location of the site and relative access to services, mitigation measures seeking to increase use of walking and public transport would be necessary.
- 41. The contributions toward improvements to the local leisure facilities are also justified on the basis of meeting the needs of the increased population of the village and demands on existing facilities. The contribution toward biodiversity offsetting is necessary to help mitigate any impacts resulting from development.

42. I conclude that the terms of the S106 agreement meet the tests set out above and thus I will take them all into account as material considerations. Nevertheless, all obligations other than that relating to affordable housing provide mitigation for the impacts of development, rather than any specific benefits.

Other Matters & Planning Balance

- 43. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations dictate otherwise. I have found conflict with policies NW2 and NW12 due to the scale and location of development in the context of the settlement hierarchy and the impact on the character and appearance of the settlement. Although the harm to character and appearance may be tempered to an extent by the localised nature of the impact and limited landscape harm, I nonetheless give very significant weight to the harm caused and conflict with policy.
- 44. I have given only limited weight to the siting of the development outside the defined settlement boundary of Wood End. Nevertheless, owing to the scale of development proposed, the level of service provision within the village and the likely use of alternatives to the car, the development would conflict with the spatial strategy within the NWCS. As found above, this is consistent with the Framework. Accordingly, I have given this factor very considerable weight.
- 45. The development would deliver up to 145 dwellings. The Framework seeks to boost significantly the supply of housing. Although I have found that the Council has a five year housing land supply, I am mindful that the eNWLP may result in a higher overall housing requirement than the LHN. I am however also conscious that the Council has a sizeable development pipeline in place and that further progress on sites not currently considered 'deliverable' will likely be made. Assuming the Inspector finds these sites sound, these emerging allocations will also have a role to play in meeting any higher housing need in the eNWLP. The delivery of additional housing is nevertheless an important factor to which I attach significant weight.
- 46. The development would make a sizeable contribution toward affordable housing provision. The appellant has submitted substantial evidence highlighting the borough's affordable housing needs and the lack of recent delivery. The conclusion of this is that there were 362 households on the Housing Register in need of an affordable home at 1 April 2019, with a high number of people expressing a preference for Wood End. The 2015 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) concluded there would be a need for 92 affordable homes per annum. Since 2011, 285 homes have been built, leaving a shortfall against this 'need' of 457 dwellings. While noting this is not a policy document or adopted target, the SHMA provides some evidence of the potential scale of the issue. There is also evidence of significant issues around affordability with much higher than average house prices in North Warwickshire. My attention has also been drawn to a number of appeal decisions going back some time, where Inspectors had given weight to the issue of affordable housing in this and other areas.
- 47. While noting the Council's comments on how they expect affordable housing to be addressed through the emerging plan, including the acceptance of exception sites and any other sources of affordable homes, it seems likely that the

- majority of provision will be through the delivery of market dwellings. I am also conscious that while the development would exceed the basic policy requirement by 10%, the requirement to provide affordable housing on viable sites is something which all viable developments will be expected to provide.
- 48. I have had regard to the appellant's views on the weight that should be given to this issue. Nevertheless, while clearly an important benefit of the scheme both locally and to the borough as a whole, I consider it should be given no more than significant weight in the planning balance.
- 49. There would be some support for local services and facilities. However, there is no indication of any concerns relating to the vitality of Wood End or any other nearby settlement. Any benefits associated with this would also be tempered by the likely environmental implications relating to the increase need to travel to meet many everyday needs. As such, I have given this factor only moderate weight. In addition, any other short-term economic benefits derived from the development garner little weight in the overall balance.
- 50. Based on the evidence before me, I have found no harm in relation to any other aspect of the development. However, a lack of harm is neutral and weighs neither for nor against the development.
- 51. I have already concluded that the 'tilted balance' is not invoked on the basis of the five year housing land supply. Nonetheless, I must also consider whether the most important policies for determining the application are out-of-date. While Policy NW2 is clearly one of the most important policies, it is not the only one. Indeed, when considering the Council's concerns over the impact of development, it is clear that Policy NW12 is also of particular importance. In seeking to achieve a high quality of design, I am satisfied that Policy NW12 remains consistent with the Framework, in particular paragraph 127, and is thus up-to-date.
- 52. As concluded above, although any reliance on settlement boundaries may carry limited weight in itself, the overarching thrust Policy NW2 remains consistent with the Framework. When looked at as a whole, I do not consider this policy to be out-of-date.
- 53. Although there are clearly other policies of relevance, it is these which I consider are critical in determining whether or not the development is acceptable in principle and thus the most important.
- 54. When considered in the round, I do not consider that the most important policies for determining the application are out-of-date. As a result, paragraph 11d does not apply and the tilted balance is not triggered on this basis either.
- 55. I acknowledge the Council may have felt bound to accept the earlier decisions in concluding its policies were out-of-date and that the 'tilted balance' was invoked as a result. I have also given these decisions considerable weight. Nevertheless, I am not bound by these decisions and do not know what evidence or arguments were put to the Inspectors. I have considered this issue, and the appeal as a whole, on the basis of the evidence before me and my observations of the area.
- 56. In conclusion, while there would clearly be some obvious benefits associated with the development, on balance, I am not persuaded that they would outweigh the harm caused by the development. As such, I find that there are

no material considerations that would justify a decision other than in accordance with the development plan in this case.

Conclusion

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

SJLee

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

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INTERESTED PERSONS:

Councillor Hayden Phillips Local Councillor

Martin Eade Local Resident

Derek Smith Local Resident

S&N Glover Local Landowner

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED AT THE HEARING

Signed and dated S106 Agreement

Local Housing Need figures (agreed by the parties)

Appeal Decision: APP/W3520/W/18/3194926

Judgement: East Bergholt Parish Council v Babergh District Council and Countyside

Properties [2018] EWHC 3400 (Admin)

Illustrative Masterplan – with indicative contour lines.