
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 August 2020

by S D Castle BSc(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/20/3248993

Halfway Up, Stoke Hill, Stoke, Andover, Hampshire SP11 0LT

- 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 & Mrs Thomas & Maxine Owen against the decision of Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 19/03104/RET, dated 04 November 2019, was refused by notice dated 14 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is a layby.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The layby has already been constructed and I have, therefore, dealt with the appeal on a retrospective basis.

Main Issue

3. The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area, including the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

4. The appeal relates to a vehicular layby constructed adjacent to the eastern side of Stoke Hill, a narrow country road. Approaching the site from both a northerly and southerly direction along Stoke Hill, the roadside vegetation does not provide for extensive views of the wider landscape but creates a more intimate and enclosed rural character. Whilst there are a limited number of vehicular accesses and informal passing places along the road, mature roadside verges comprising hedgerows and trees are predominant, giving the roadsides a distinctly rural and undeveloped character.
5. The roadside verge rises steeply to the east of the highway at the appeal site. As a result, construction of the layby has required excavation into the steep roadside bank and construction of a retaining wall comprising timber sleepers and metal posts. The layby has been surfaced with hardstanding comprising plainings that appear predominantly light brown in colour. The adjacent single storey timber buildings occupy an elevated floor level in comparison to the road

and, at the time of my site visit, there was significant vegetation between the layby and the adjacent commercial buildings.

6. The materials used in the development, in combination with the adjacent planting, somewhat soften the visual impact of the development. Nevertheless, the replacement of the original vegetated roadside verge with an engineered hard surface has resulted in a development that is harmfully prominent, incongruous and urbanising given the rural and undeveloped character of the surrounding area. Paragraph 172 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Although the visual and landscape character impact are relatively localised, the development is prominent from the public highway. It appears discordant in its verdant setting provided by the roadside verges, trees and hedgerows running immediately adjacent to the road and characteristic of this part of the AONB.
7. Whilst I understand the appellants' desire to prevent roadside verge parking and to limit access to their property for security reasons, it is not clear why visitors who present at the gates of the premises could not be allowed to park within the wider commercial site. Such an arrangement is common for many commercial premises. Given the extent of engineering works that have taken place and the need to keep the layby clear for parking, I am not persuaded that a landscaping scheme secured by condition would acceptably mitigate the harms identified above.
8. The above factors lead me to conclude that the development unacceptably harms the character and appearance of the area and does not conserve or enhance the landscape character and scenic beauty of the AONB. Consequently, the development is contrary to Policies EM1 and EM10 of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2016) and Policies P5 and P7 of the St Mary Bourne Parish Neighbourhood Plan (2018) which, taken together, amongst other things, require development to respond positively to the local environment and to be sympathetic to the character and visual quality of the area, whilst respecting and enhancing the visual amenity of the landscape likely to be affected. There is also conflict with the Council's Landscape, Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document (2018) insofar as it requires landscape, biodiversity and tree considerations to be integrated into the development process from the outset. Furthermore, the development is contrary to paragraphs 127, 170 and 172 of the Framework, which amongst other things, relate to ensuring that developments are sympathetic to local character, and that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Conclusion

9. For the above reasons, the appeal is dismissed.

S D Castle

INSPECTOR