



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 November 2020

by Benjamin Clarke BA (Hons.) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: Wednesday, 25 November 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/J1915/W/20/3253823

Walnut Tree House, Acorn Street, Hunsdon SG12 8PG

- 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 Mr & Mrs P. & M. Morris against the decision of East Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref: 3/20/0636/FUL, dated 23 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 May 2020.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of an existing stable and hay and tack store building to create a three-bedroom dwelling and two parking spaces.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - the suitability of the site as a location for a residential development;
 - the effect of the development upon the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - the effect of the development upon the availability of equine facilities.

Reasons

Suitability of the site

3. The appeal site is located on the periphery of the village, with fields to the rear and one side of the site. Dwellings within the surrounding area are generally arranged in a linear form.
4. The proposed dwelling would be located within the existing stable building, however, there are some large areas of open areas immediate adjacent to it. Therefore, notwithstanding the precise classification of the settlement, the proposed development cannot be accurately described as being an infill development.
5. Furthermore, due to the nature of the appeal site's location, residents of the development are likely to need to travel to other settlements in order to access all the services and facilities that they may need on a day-to-day basis.
6. On account of the nature of the settlement, there is less access to public transport. Whilst there are pavements between the appeal site and the nearby

- settlement of Hunsdon these are relatively narrow and have limited lighting. This means that these pavements might not be attractive routes for all occupiers of the development, such as those with pushchairs. Furthermore, their relatively narrow width and lack of lighting may also deter some pedestrians during periods of poor weather or lighting.
7. The lack of a welcoming pedestrian environment is therefore likely to deter residents of the development from undertaking journeys by methods such as walking and would, in turn, increase the usage of private cars for travel.
 8. This means that irrespective of the proximity of the proposed development to the settlement of Hunsdon, residents are likely to be reliant upon private vehicles for the bulk of their travel. Furthermore, the appeal site lies outside of the settlement boundaries of Hunsdon.
 9. My attention has been drawn to other developments within the surrounding area. I do not have the full information regarding their planning circumstances, which lessens the weight that I can attribute to them. Nonetheless, I note that these were permitted under the provisions of a different development plan. Given that the proposed development would result in more people living within the locality, residents of the proposed development are more likely to meet other people when using the pavements in the vicinity. Owing to the relatively narrow width of the pavements, some people might need to step into the road in order to pass. This would cause potential conflict between pedestrians and passing vehicles. In result, the presence of other developments in the surrounding area does not overcome my previous concerns.
 10. The appellant has highlighted Policy VILL3 of the East Hertfordshire District Plan (2018) (the District Plan). Whilst this policy identifies some residential developments as being acceptable, the policy is clear that developments will be permitted in villages with an adopted Neighbourhood Plan. The evidence before me indicates that there is no currently adopted Neighbourhood Plan covering the appeal site.
 11. Furthermore, this policy also highlights that such development should be a limited infill. Whilst the proposed development would be adjacent to an existing dwelling, there would be open areas to one side and to the rear. In consequence, the proposed development would not be an infill. I am therefore unable to give this policy a significant amount of weight in my considerations.
 12. I therefore conclude that the siting of the proposed development would represent an unsuitable location for a proposed dwelling. The development, in this regard, would conflict with Policies GBR2, INT1 and TRA1 of the District Plan. These, amongst other matters, seek to ensure that developments are primarily located in places which enable sustainable journeys to be made to key services and facilities; specify the most appropriate types of development; and consider planning applications in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Character and appearance

13. The proposed development would result in the conversion of the stable block to a dwelling. This would involve the installation of additional doors and windows, in addition to the creation of a garden area. The appeal site is near to the Acorn Street and close to fields. A public footpath runs across these fields.

14. The building currently has a functional style of architecture that is commensurate with its purpose. In consequence, it does not appear particularly incongruous given that it is viewed alongside fields.
15. Whilst the proposed development would not result in an enlarged building, its appearance would be substantially altered. In particular, the proposed dwelling would feature a greater number of doors and significantly larger areas of glazing. Therefore, the building would be changed so that it would have a much more domestic appearance.
16. Furthermore, the proposed development would include a garden area. In time this could feature various items of domestic paraphernalia, which would further erode the current functional style of architecture that is a feature of the site, in addition to the general open character of the landscape within this location.
17. In addition, in order to provide access and vehicle manoeuvring spaces to the development, an increased amount of hard surfacing would be provided. In consequence, this element would erode the verdant character that is a feature of this part of the appeal site.
18. These matters are of importance owing to the prominence of the site. The site is in proximity to the road and therefore the development would be visible from passers-by, in addition to the occupiers of the dwellings on the opposite side of the road. Whilst there are hedges adjacent to the road, the screening effect would only be partial and, in consequence, would not overcome my concerns.
19. In addition, views of the development would be possible from the footpath running adjacent to the appeal site. This means that users of the footpath would have views of the rear garden's boundaries and the rear elevation of the proposed dwelling. This would be in addition to the potential views of parts of any outbuildings or structures within the rear garden.
20. For these reasons, the proposed development has the potential to be experienced by many people, which would therefore exacerbate the overall adverse effects upon the character and appearance of the surrounding area. Whilst the proposed development could include some landscaping at the boundaries, this is unlikely to effectively screen the entirety of the dwelling.
21. I acknowledge that under the provisions of the existing use, items such as horse boxes might be parked at the site and open storage of hay might take place. However, such activities would be commonly associated within the countryside and would not necessarily be of the same scale as the proposed development. Accordingly, this would not outweigh my previous concerns.
22. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would erode the character and appearance of the surrounding area. The development, in this regard, would conflict with Policies GBR2, DES3 and DES4 of the District Plan. These, amongst other matters, seek to ensure that new developments have a design that is appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the site and/or the surrounding area; that proposals demonstrate how they will retain, protect and enhance existing landscape features; and be of a high standard of design.

Effect on equine facilities

23. The appeal site consists of a stable building, and the site also features some outdoor areas. These appear to have been used on a non-commercial basis.

24. Owing to the nature and scope of the proposed development, these facilities would cease to be operational. Whilst I am conscious that it does not appear that these can be used by visiting members of the public, I have been directed towards planning policies that seek to ensure the retention of such facilities. This policy does not make a distinction between commercial and non-commercial facilities.
25. Owing to the proximity of the appeal site to the countryside it appears that such facilities may be required by future occupiers of the surrounding area on a recreational or hobby basis as it would support the carrying out of equine related hobbies within a less developed context.
26. I acknowledge that concerns have been raised regarding the access and manoeuvring areas. Whilst this might render it difficult to utilise the development with larger vehicles, it has not been conclusively demonstrated that it is not possible to utilise smaller alternatives.
27. It has also been highlighted that the appellant has not been able to accommodate their horses within the stable. However, it has not been demonstrated that a smaller number of horses could be accommodated within the existing development. As such, I do not believe that this point outweighs my previous concerns.
28. The evidence before me is not indicative that it has been established that there is not an ongoing demand for such a facility within the surrounding area. In addition, it has also not been demonstrated that the existing facilities are not of a suitable standard to continue being operational. In consequence, I do not believe that the loss of the equine facilities has been appropriately justified.
29. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would result in an unacceptable loss of equine facilities. The development, in this regard, conflicts with Policy CFLR6 of the District Plan. This, amongst other matters, requires that proposals that result in the loss of equestrian facilities should be accompanied by an Equestrian Needs Assessment which demonstrates that the facilities are no longer needed.

Conclusion

30. For the preceding reasons, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Benjamin Clarke

INSPECTOR