



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 9 February 2021

by Scott Britnell MSc FdA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1 March 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/20/3261314

Five Acres, Bath Road, Woolhampton, Reading RG7 5RH

- 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 Clinton Putnam against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
- The application Ref 20/00388/FULD, dated 6 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 15 April 2020.
- The development proposed is the erection of two detached 3 bed dwellings.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Council's officer report indicates that the site is in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). However, this is not referred to anywhere else in the evidence of either party and the questionnaire states that the site is not within an AONB. I have proceeded on the basis that the appeal site is not in the AONB.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area,
 - Whether the appeal site is suitable for the proposed development, with particular regard to its location; and,
 - Whether the proposed development would provide for acceptable living conditions for future occupants, with particular regard to noise

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. The appeal site is at the end of a loose collection of dwellings on the south side of the Bath Road (the A4). I observed a single storey building and other structures on site, as well as domestic paraphernalia and vehicles. To the east is a field and to the rear is a dwelling, The Stables. Beyond that dwelling is a railway line and the River Kennet. The proposal is for two self-build dwellings¹.
5. In its current form, the appeal site provides a visual transition between the dwellings to the west and the open countryside to the east. The proposal

¹ As confirmed by the Residential/Dwelling Units – Supplementary information template.

would extend the frontage formed by the existing properties along the A4 that would intrude visually into this area with an urban form. This would be exacerbated by the large parking area to the front of the dwellings that would be finished with road planings or gravel. There is also likely to be residential paraphernalia as a result the domestic use, which would add to the existing residential activity associated with The Stables.

6. Moreover, the spacing between the proposed dwellings would not reflect the more informal layout of the existing dwellings to the west, which contributes to the area's sense of openness and rural character. Although the vegetation to the front of the site would offer a degree of screening, the proposed dwellings would be visible when approached from the west, the gardens of adjacent properties and from across the field to the east. Further, due to their location, scale and two storey form they would have a greater impact on the area than the existing structures on the appeal site and The Stables to the rear. They would appear as conspicuous additions to the area and would have a harmful urbanising effect on its rural character and appearance.
7. The appellant has referred me to the development at Railside, indicating that the proposal seeks to replicate this at a lower density. Given the distance between the appeal site and Railside, and the general form, design and character of that development, I do not consider that it is directly comparable to the appeal proposal. As such, my findings are unchanged.
8. I conclude that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. As such, there would be conflict with Policy C3 of the HSA² and Policies CS14 and CS19 of the Core Strategy (CS)³. Collectively, these seek, among other things, to ensure that development is appropriate in terms of location and that it has regard to the character and appearance of an area. There would also be conflict with the Quality Design West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document June 2006, which states, amongst other things, that development should seek to complement and enhance existing areas.

Suitability of Location

9. The appeal site is located to the east of Woolhampton. Area Delivery Plan Policy 1 (ADPP1) of the CS identifies Woolhampton as a service village with a more limited range of services and some limited development potential. The appellant states that the appeal site is located 800 metres from the village and that its services include shops, churches, a primary school, prep school, village hall, and Midgham Railway Station. The Council indicate that the appeal site is approximately 0.5 kilometres from the settlement boundary. In terms of planning policy, the appeal site is in open countryside and there is no dispute between the main parties on this matter.
10. Policy ADPP1 states that West Berkshire's main urban areas will be the focus for most development and that in the open countryside only appropriate limited development will be allowed, focused on addressing identified needs and maintaining a strong rural economy. Area Delivery Plan Policy 6 (ADPP6) of the CS sets out the strategic vision for the East Kennet Valley area. This states

² Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (2006-2026) Adopted 2017

³ West Berkshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2006-2026) Adopted 2012

that the relatively low growth proposed for this area (in new housing) reflects the more limited services and poorer transport connections.

11. CS Policy CS1 states that new homes will be located in accordance with the settlement hierarchy. They will be primarily developed on suitable previously developed land within settlement boundaries; other suitable land within settlement boundaries; strategic sites and broad locations identified on the Core Strategy Key Diagrams; and land allocated for residential development in subsequent Development Plan Documents. There is no evidence before me to indicate that the proposed development would meet these criteria.
12. Policy C1 of the HSA states that there will be a presumption against new residential development outside of the settlement boundaries, subject to a number of exceptions. The appellant acknowledges that the proposal is contrary to this policy and having assessed the proposal against it I agree. However, the appellant suggests that the proposal is in accordance with HSA Policy C2. This states that small scale rural exception housing schemes will be permitted adjacent to rural settlements to meet a local housing need. Affordable housing within the scheme must remain affordable in perpetuity and rural exception sites are expected to deliver 100% affordable housing.
13. The appellant states that he is willing to enter into a legal agreement to secure the proposed dwellings as affordable housing in the event of the eventual sale or rental of the proposed dwellings. However, there is no planning obligation before me to this effect and the suggested terms would fail to secure the dwellings as affordable housing in perpetuity, as they would only come into effect if the dwellings are sold or rented following their initial occupation by the proposed self-builders. As such, I afford limited weight to this matter.
14. The appellant also suggests that the Local Plan does not make any specific provision for self-build and custom housebuilding. The Council have referred me to an appeal decision in which this matter was considered and where the Inspector found that the development plan does allow for the provision of self-build/custom build, although no specific mention is made⁴. Rather, the plan requires an appropriate mix of housing based on the needs of various and different groups in the community, including those wishing to build their own homes. There is nothing sufficiently compelling in the evidence before me to lead me to reach a different conclusion.
15. Further, the absence of a planning obligation means that the self-build status of the proposed dwellings cannot be secured, regardless of whether the Council is able to demonstrate that it has met its commitments in terms of the provision of custom and self-build housing. As such, I afford limited weight to this matter.
16. The stretch of the A4 upon which the appeal site is located is subject to the 60 mph national speed limit. At the time of my visit it was busy with vehicular traffic. While my observations represent a snapshot in time, there is nothing before me to indicate that the conditions I observed were not typical.
17. There are footpaths on either side of the carriageway leading to Woolhampton from the appeal site. However, these vary in width and with traffic passing in close proximity at high speed. As such, while the village is within walking

⁴ APP/W0340/W/16/3166113.

distance, it is not a pleasant route and is likely to be avoided if other means of transport are available. Such an alternative may be a local bus service, although I have not been provided with any information in relation to these. Moreover, no details of any designated cycle routes in the area have been submitted and cycling along the A4 would be unappealing due to the weight and speed of traffic. Therefore, future occupants of the proposed dwellings are likely to rely on the private motor vehicle to access every day services and facilities, including employment. This is the least sustainable transport option and as such indicates to me that the appeal site is not suitable for new housing development.

18. I note the appellant's comments regarding the planning permission for residential development at the layby west of 1 Sunhill. That permission was for 8 affordable dwellings arranged in four pairs of semi-detached properties at a site near to but not immediately in the location of the appeal proposal. As such, it is viewed in a different context and is not directly comparable to the scheme before me. Moreover, while the Council found that the housing in that scheme had good links to facilities and services, this is not the case in the proposal before me for the reasons I have set out. Consequently, the Sunhill scheme does not justify the unacceptable development proposed.
19. I conclude that the appeal site would not provide a suitable location for housing. The proposals would conflict with CS Policies ADPP1, ADPP6 and CS1 and HSA Policies C1 and C2, which together contribute to the Council's strategy for directing residential development to appropriate locations.

Living Conditions

20. The proposed dwellings would be located on the A4 with a railway line to the rear of the site, both of which are likely to generate noise and vibration. Particularly in the case of the former given its apparent busyness. While there is existing residential development in the area, I consider that a noise assessment would be necessary to more accurately assess and thus understand its likely effect on the living conditions of future occupants. No such assessment has been provided with the appeal documents.
21. I can therefore only conclude that there would be conflict with saved Policy OVS.6 of the Local Plan (LP)⁵, which states that proposals for noise sensitive developments should have regard to existing sources of noise. The Council also refer to LP Policy OVS.5, which states that the Council will only permit development proposals where they do not give rise to an unacceptable pollution of the environment. There is no evidence before me that the proposal would result in such an impact and so this policy is not directly relevant to my assessment.

Conclusion

22. The proposed dwellings would contribute to the area's housing stock, adding to choice and mix locally. There would accordingly be some social and economic benefits arising. However, these would be limited given the quantum of development proposed. Taking these together with the appellant's other arguments in support of the appeal scheme it is my overall conclusion that they would not be sufficient to overcome the multiple harms and conflicts with the

⁵ West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006, saved Policies 2007.

development plan that I have found, to which I ascribe substantial weight. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Scott Britnell

INSPECTOR