



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 31 March 2021

by Scott Britnell MSc FdA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 04 June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/20/3265564

**Heath Farm Cottage, Southend Road, Bradfield Southend, Reading
RG7 6EP**

- 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 Steljes against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref 20/01762/FUL, dated 3 August 2020, was refused by notice dated 11 November 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as erection of No.2 residential dwellings with soft landscaping and associated works (resubmission of 20/00491/FUL).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on:
 - The character and appearance of the area, including the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and,
 - The living conditions of the occupants of the dwellings at Woodslee and Broadlands, in particular in relation to overlooking and loss of privacy and outlook.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Paragraph 172 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that great weight should be given to conserving or enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in, among other areas, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these matters.
4. There is a mix of dwellings along Southend Road in terms of their scale, form materials and architectural styles, which results in a varied street scene. However, the prevailing pattern of development in the vicinity of the appeal site is of detached dwellings fronting the highway in a linear form. Moreover, dwellings have long, open and undeveloped rear gardens that, consequently, provide a visual transition to the open countryside beyond. The sense of spaciousness garnered from the gardens is a locally distinctive feature that contributes positively to the area's character and appearance and that of the AONB.
5. Due to the siting of the proposed development, the appeal scheme would noticeably erode the sense of spaciousness of the area, reducing its quality and

significantly interrupting the aforementioned sense of transition to the open countryside beyond the appeal site. Given the two storey scale of the proposed development and its depth within the appeal site, and the nature of the neighbouring properties, that interruption would feel quite abrupt and harsh. These effects, and thus the depth of the development, would be evident from neighbouring properties, the bridleway adjacent to the site and the adjacent countryside. They would also be evident across front garden of the dwelling at Broadlands, where the proposal would close off views of the countryside. Therefore, while the appeal site is located within the settlement boundary, the proposals would undermine the existing relationship between development along Southend Road and the surrounding countryside. Moreover, the resultant domestic creep would be harmful to and fail to conserve or enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB.

6. The above harm would be exacerbated by the removal of mature vegetation and trees at the appeal site. While the appellant indicates that none of the trees or vegetation are protected, the removal of such features would contribute to proposal resulting in the abrupt and harsh transition to the countryside that I have identified above. Although a landscaping scheme could be secured by condition, in the event that the appeal is allowed, I do not consider that this would be sufficient to overcome that harm, which would be instant and stark in the short to medium term.
7. I note that the proposed gardens would comply with the size requirements of the Quality Design West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document Residential Development June 2006 (SPD) and would provide sufficient outdoor amenity space for the future occupants of the proposed and existing dwellings. However, the front elevations of the proposed dwellings would sit close to the front of their plots, which would have only minimal front garden areas. In addition, the backland nature of the proposed development would fail to reflect the prevailing single tier frontage form of development in this location. Consequently, the plots would appear cramped compared to other gardens in the locality and the proposal would fail to respect the prevailing pattern of development in the area.
8. In reaching this conclusion, I note the appellants' comments that the appeal site is in residential use and that it can be developed with residential outbuildings and domestic paraphernalia that would either not be development or could be provided under permitted development. I did observe domestic outbuildings to the rear of properties in this location but these were unobtrusive and modest in scale, which would not be the case in respect of the proposed two storey dwellings before me. Moreover, I have assessed the proposal on its own merit and have no alternative developments before me. Further, the extent of the development before me is likely to be greater than any that could be achieved without an application for planning permission.
9. I also note the examples referred to by the appellant of other developments that are set back from the highway along Southend Road. However, these are located some distance from the appeal site and so are not seen in the same context. Moreover, I have not been provided with the full details of these developments and each case must be considered on its own merits. Further, I consider that these examples are limited in their extent and impact, which serves only to highlight and reinforce the prevailing pattern of development.

10. I conclude that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and the AONB. There would be conflict with Policies ADPP5, CS14, CS18 and CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006 – 2026) Development Plan Document Adopted July 2012 (CS) and Policies C1 and C3 of the Housing Site Allocations DPD (2006-2026) Adopted May 2017. In summary, these policies seek to ensure that proposed development respects the character of the locality as well as respecting the landscape of the surrounding area, including the AONB. There would also be conflict with Section 15 of the Framework with regards to protecting Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There would be conflict too with the objectives of Part 2 of the SPD, which states, amongst other things, that new development on sites close to the edge of a settlement will need to demonstrate how the inter-relationship between open countryside and development form is respected.
11. The Council also refer to CS Policies ADPP1 and Policy CS1. These are strategic policies and I do not consider them to be pertinent to this main issue.
12. I note that the appellant considers that the appearance of the proposed dwellings, in terms of their individual design, is acceptable. From my observations I have no reason to reach a different conclusion. Nevertheless, while I do not consider that the individual design of the proposed dwellings would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area, their presence in this location would be harmful for the reasons I have identified.

Living conditions

13. Due to the layout of the proposed development, the first floor windows of both proposed dwellings would look out towards the rear garden of the dwelling at Woodslee. One window in each dwelling would be above the stairs so is unlikely to be an area where the future occupants of the proposed dwellings would spend much time. However, the other windows would serve bedrooms and it is reasonable to consider that these rooms could be occupied for a number of hours each day.
14. Given the relationship between the proposed dwellings and Woodslee, including the distance between them, the bedroom windows of the proposed dwelling in plot 3 would afford views of the rear garden of Woodslee. This would include the more private area of the garden up against the rear of the dwelling. Consequently, the proposals would make these areas less pleasant to use and would result in harm to the living conditions of the occupants of that dwelling.
15. In reaching this conclusion, I note that the east boundary of the appeal site and the west boundary of Woodslee are populated with trees and other vegetation. However, the existing planting on the appeal site would not be sufficient to negate the overlooking I have identified, while there is no evidence before me to indicate that the appellants have any control over the planting on the boundary of Woodslee. I have also considered whether new landscaping and planting could overcome these concerns. However, given that the east boundary of the appeal site would be in close proximity to the main living area and kitchen/dining room windows of the proposed dwellings, and the height at which any screening would need to be to be effective, such a solution would be likely to be harmful to the living conditions of the occupants of the proposed dwellings.

16. Moreover, because the proposed development pattern deviates so clearly from the existing, I consider that the effects of the overlooking and intervisibility that I have identified becomes more pronounced. The resultant overlooking, therefore, is more harmful than the distances and screening might otherwise suggest.
17. To the west of the appeal site is the dwelling at Broadlands. I observed that two of the windows in the east elevation of that dwelling are obscure glazed. However, there is a third window that is fitted with clear glazing. The occupant of Broadlands indicates that the window serves a bedroom¹, which it is reasonable to consider might be in use for a number of hours each day. Given the relationship between the window and the proposed dwelling on plot 2, the proposed dwelling would appear as an overbearing presence from this window. This would make the area that it serves less pleasant to use and would cause harm to the living conditions of the occupants of Broadlands.
18. I conclude that the proposals would cause harm to the living conditions of the occupants of the dwellings at Woodslee and Broadlands. There would be conflict with CS Policy CS14 which states, among other things, that new development must make a positive contribution to the quality of life in West Berkshire. There would also be conflict with paragraph 127f) of the Framework which seeks to ensure that developments create places with a high standard of amenity for existing users. There would be conflict too with the SPD which, in summary, seeks to ensure that proposed developments do not harm the living conditions of occupants of neighbouring and nearby dwellings.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

19. The proposed development would make an efficient use of land and would contribute to the Council's supply of housing. It would also be likely to have a number of economic and social benefits, including through the construction period and because future occupants are likely to use local services and facilities. However, as the proposal would result in two new homes, I attribute limited weight to these matters.
20. Moreover, the proposed development would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area, including the AONB and the living conditions of the occupants of the dwellings at Woodslee and Broadlands. It would also conflict with the development plan and I attribute significant weight to these matters.
21. For the above reasons, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the National Planning Policy Framework, and all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Scott Britnell

INSPECTOR

¹ Letter dated 6 October 2020.