



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 15 June 2021

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25th June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/W/21/3270678

**Land Adjacent Mayfield Barn, Westfield Road, Long Crendon,
Buckinghamshire HP18 9EN**

- 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 and Mrs Flint against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council - North Area (Aylesbury).
 - The application Ref 20/03363/AOP, dated 2 October 2020, was refused by notice dated 23 November 2020.
 - The development proposed is erection of a dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application was made in outline with all matters reserved for future consideration except for access. In addition to a plan detailing the access to the site, the submission includes a plan showing Indicative Sections, and a Proposed Block/Site Plan which consider how the site may be developed. The Proposed Block/Site Plan is not marked as indicative or illustrative. However, from the evidence before me, both main parties have treated it as such, with the Council's officer report confirming that detailed matters relating to design, appearance and siting are not for consideration and referring to the submitted drawings as illustrative. I have considered the appeal on the same basis, and have regarded those elements which do not pertain to access as illustrative.
3. The Council advise that consultation on 'Further Main Modifications' to the emerging Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (eVALP) took place between December 2020 and February 2021, but that these do not result in any significant changes to policies most relevant to the appeal proposal. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out that weight may be given to relevant policies in emerging plans according to its stage of preparation; the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies; and the degree of consistency with the Framework. Given the advanced stage that it has reached and the evidence before me regarding the relevance of the further main modifications to the appeal scheme, I afford moderate weight to the policies of the eVALP cited within the refusal reasons on the decision notice.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are (i) whether or not the proposed development would provide a suitable location for housing having regard to its position within the countryside and its accessibility to services and facilities; and (ii) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Suitability of the Location

5. Westfield Road is a fairly narrow rural road with no footpaths or lighting that extends from Bicester Road on the outskirts of Long Crendon. The appeal proposes a dwelling on part of a paddock which sits between a dwelling known as Mayfield Barn and a stable building, beyond which is Crendon House. The main parties agree that the proposal would not result in the creation of an isolated home in the countryside which paragraph 79 of the Framework seeks generally to avoid unless certain listed circumstances apply. Given the evidence before me and the proximity of the site to other buildings, I see no reason to reach a different view.
6. However, the site is outside of the settlement boundary of Long Crendon as defined within the Long Crendon Neighbourhood Plan 2017 (NP) and is considered to be within the countryside in planning policy terms. In addition, the appeal site together with the remainder of the adjacent paddock provide for considerable separation between Mayfield Barn and the neighbouring stables, and together with these stables result in a distinct open break between the dwellings at Mayfield Barn and Crendon House. Given the extent of this separation, Crendon House appeared to me somewhat set apart and discrete from Mayfield Barn and its neighbouring buildings including Crinan Barn and Baileys Farm. Hill Farm is similarly set apart and detached from the Mayfield Barn group to the east. In view of this loose relationship as well as the limited number of the buildings in the vicinity of the site, their use and nature and the evidence before me, I do not consider that the site is part of a developed frontage or continuous ribbon along Westfield Road, and in my judgement could not reasonably be described as constituting a settlement in which the appeal site would sit.
7. Policy LC1 of the NP advises that proposals for development outside the settlement boundary will only be supported if they are appropriate forms of development within rural areas and they are consistent with policies including relating to landscape character and protecting the natural environment. The NP does not define what constitutes appropriate forms of development within rural areas. However, the supporting text to policy LC1 notes that the objectives of the plan are to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside but to allow for sustainable growth to meet local housing needs. To meet these needs, the boundary of the settlement is described as accommodating site allocations to deliver new homes, with provision to deliver further homes through suitable infill sites continuing growth of the village. Taking these provisions together with the commentary that the policy is intended to distinguish consideration of applications within the settlement from those outside the boundary, it seems to me that housing is expected to be delivered from allocations and infill within the settlement in order to provide the necessary sustainable growth to meet local housing needs. While I have found nothing in the NP to explicitly preclude new housing outside of the settlement boundary, the site is some way from the edge of Long Crendon and is not within a location where I find that there is general support by the NP for new housing development.
8. The weight that I afford to the eVALP is more limited given that I cannot be certain that it will be adopted in its current form. Nonetheless, it identifies Long

Crendon as a 'large village'. Policy D3 outlines that small-scale development not allocated within the plan or a made neighbourhood plan will be restricted to small scale areas of land within the built-up areas of settlements. As an unallocated site outside of the built-up area of Long Crendon, the proposal would be contrary to this approach. Policy S2 of the eVALP provides the overall spatial strategy for growth, and the appellant has referred to part j of the policy which sets out that housing development elsewhere in rural areas will be strictly limited, and is likely to be incremental infill development and should be principally in line with policies including D5. However, development at larger villages is addressed at part g of the policy. In addition, Policy D5 relates to housing at other settlements which are not identified within the settlement hierarchy and concerns situations where there is no neighbourhood plan in place. Given the identification of Long Crendon as a large village and the NP, I am not persuaded that this policy is of direct relevance to the appeal site or that the eVALP offers general support for housing on the appeal site. In any event, Policies D3 and D5 of the eVALP include respective requirements that development is in keeping with the character of its surroundings and does not adversely affect the character of the countryside. NP Policy LC1 similarly requires development outside of the settlement boundary to be consistent with policies including relating to landscape character. I consider these matters further under my second main issue below.

9. As a large village, Long Crendon offers some access to facilities, services and public transport including bus stops which provide a connection to Thame where there is a wider range of services. The site is located around 800m from the settlement boundary of Long Crendon. However, I saw that the closest bus stop is located some way into the settlement with services largely centred around the High Street further beyond. As a result, total distances to reach these would be much greater. In addition, for a fairly significant proportion of the route along Westfield Road to the settlement edge, there is no footway or street lighting which would be likely to deter walking or cycling, particularly for the elderly, those with a disability or with children; and at times of darkness. The appellant has referred additionally to potential to use local footpaths, but from the information before me these would not provide a direct route to access services, further increasing journey distances and times.
10. The appellant may intend to occupy the development, but I must consider all potential future occupiers. In my judgement, the above factors in combination with the overall distance would mean most occupiers of the site would not consider walking or cycling to be realistic options and would be unlikely to undertake such journeys regularly. Accordingly, I find that opportunities to access services and facilities by means other than private vehicle would be very limited.
11. Vehicle journeys to Long Crendon would be fairly short, and I recognise that the Framework comments that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. However, future occupiers of the development would in this case be likely to rely heavily on private vehicles. To this extent, there would be conflict with requirements within the Framework seeking active management of patterns of growth to support objectives including promoting opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport use and highlighting accessible services to meet needs as a key aspect of sustainable development. That dwellings elsewhere may be located a similar

distance from services within Long Crendon is not in itself a compelling reason to support development in an unsuitable location.

12. In rural areas, the Framework advises that decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs. It further notes that housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities and that development in one village may support services in a village nearby. However, the Council is able to demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing and there is no substantive evidence before me that the approach within the NP is failing to meet local needs, nor demonstrating that the proposal is otherwise necessary to meet local needs. Moreover, the potential contribution that one dwelling on the appeal site could offer to enhancing or maintaining the vitality of rural communities and supporting the rural economy is limited.
13. For these reasons, I do not consider that the proposal would in this case deliver an appropriate form of development within the rural area and find that the dwelling outside of a defined settlement would be contrary to the overall strategy to provide for sustainable growth within the NP and the eVALP.
14. In reaching this view, I have had regard to proposals for development at Blackmore End, Essex and at Little Bardfield, Essex drawn to my attention by the appellant. However, the Inspector in the Little Bardfield appeal decision found that the site was within a settlement in its own right where infilling was allowed for under the terms of the policies of the development plan, irrespective of access to services. It is therefore distinct from the current appeal where I do not consider that the size and characteristics of the area including the appeal site comprises a settlement. The development at Blackmore End was also described as part of a recognisable village, and while access to services was found to be poor, the lack of a five year supply of housing meant in that case that policies controlling development outside of town development boundaries and village envelopes were considered out of date in accordance with provisions of the Framework. In that context, the adverse impacts of the proposal were not considered to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. The circumstances of these examples including with regard to the development plan context are not therefore directly comparable to the appeal before me which I have in any case considered on its own merits.
15. I therefore conclude on this main issue that the proposed development would not provide a suitable location for housing with regard to its location within the countryside and access to services. The proposal would not accord with the overall spatial strategy provided by NP Policy LC1 and Policy D3 of the eVALP, and would be contrary to provisions of the Framework noted above.

Character and Appearance

16. There are a few dispersed buildings or small, loose groups of buildings along Westfield Road which are set on typically large plots and which appear to be in predominantly residential, agricultural or equestrian use. However, for the most part the road is lined by open fields or paddocks marked by belts of trees or hedgerows. Together with the scattered arrangement of diverse buildings and the surrounding rolling landscape which is similarly wide and open and largely uninfluenced by built form, this gives the area around the appeal site a highly open and distinctly rural character.

17. I agree with the Council that the submitted illustrative details of the dwelling broadly reflect converted agricultural buildings in the vicinity of the site, and I am satisfied that it would be possible to design a dwelling of sympathetic form and architectural appearance in keeping with development nearby.
18. Be that as it may, the site is currently open and forms part of the spacious setting to buildings in the vicinity which adds to the rural character and appearance of the area. Given also its size, I consider that the site together with the adjacent open paddock makes a reasonable contribution to the openness of the wider landscape, and serve to detach Crendon House from the small group of buildings including Mayfield Barn, Crinan Barn and Baileys Farm.
19. Irrespective of its detailed layout, scale and appearance, the presence of the development would result in a loss of openness and would give the site a domestic appearance. I acknowledge that the dwelling could be positioned so as not to extend the spread of built form further from Westfield Road than adjacent buildings at Mayfield Barn. However with regard to the extent of the existing gap between Mayfield Barn and Crendon House and the stables adjacent to the site and the separation that would remain between the appeal site and Mayfield Barn, I do not consider that the dwelling would appear as a continuation of an existing frontage or ribbon of development. Instead, the proposal would result in the encroachment of built form into the undeveloped appeal site, eroding the open setting between the existing buildings. This would be urbanising, and would result in a degree of coalescence of Crendon House with the small group including Mayfield Barn which does not currently exist.
20. Despite the existing development nearby I find as a consequence that the proposal would result in an unwelcome and intrusive incursion of built form into the countryside to the detriment of the generally undeveloped and rural landscape character and appearance of the area. It would not therefore maintain the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
21. The site is partly screened by vegetation, and my observations at my visit reflect the appellant's Landscape Visual Appraisal which notes that views into the site are largely limited to the immediate vicinity of the site or to glimpsed views over long distances. These longer-range views include some from public rights of way to the west of the site. However, the large distances involved mean that the site makes up a very small component of these views. Based on the indicative details of the scale of the development and other buildings in the vicinity, I do not consider that it would be conspicuous in these views and find that the visual impact of the proposal on the wider landscape would be limited. In addition, the evidence before me does not suggest that there would be harm to views of identified importance in the local area.
22. Nevertheless, the development would be apparent from Westfield Road, including along the new access from the road and from the entrance to a nearby right of way to the front of the adjacent stables, resulting in a distinct loss of openness. Although there are existing views of Mayfield Barn and the right of way continues alongside the garden of Crendon House, the spread of urbanising development into the existing open gap would detract from the open and rural character and appearance of this part of the landscape.
23. I therefore conclude on this main issue that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area in which it is located. The harm would be localised, but would nevertheless conflict with

saved policies GP.35 and GP.38 of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan 2004 and Policy LC9 of the NP. Together, these policies broadly seek development that respects and complements the characteristics of the site and surroundings and the natural qualities and features of the area, and require amongst other things that proposals reflect distinctive local landscape features. For the same reasons, the proposal would be contrary to Policy NE4 of the eVALP which includes a requirement that development respects local character and distinctiveness.

Other Matters and Planning Balance

24. I acknowledge details of other proposals for dwellings along Westfield Road that have been approved. However, these related to either sites allocated for development, replacement of existing dwellings, conversion of agricultural buildings under permitted development rights, or were sites partly within the settlement boundary including existing structures which were to be replaced. While illustrating change to the area over time, their circumstances are not therefore directly comparable to the appeal proposal.
25. Long Crendon Parish Council have not raised an objection to the proposal, but that does not outweigh the harm that I have found and the resulting conflict with the development plan. That the Council raises no objection in relation to matters of highways, parking, living conditions for neighbouring or future occupiers, flooding, drainage, trees and the historic environment is also a neutral consideration in the planning balance.
26. Although there is no disagreement between the parties that the Council is able to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites, the proposal would make effective use of the site and would deliver an additional dwelling towards the supply of housing which the appellant advises would come forward as self-build. In light of clear objectives within the Framework to significantly boost the supply of housing and offer a mix of housing, and recognition that small sites such as this can make an important contribution to meeting housing requirements of an area, these are important benefits and I give them great weight. However, the extent of the benefit would be limited by the very modest contribution that the proposal would make to the supply of housing overall. There would additionally be some economic and social benefits associated with development of the site and investment by future occupiers contributing to local services and facilities, but these would also be restricted by its small scale and I afford them limited weight.
27. The proposal would also offer potential for biodiversity enhancements through inclusion of bat and bird boxes, and the appellant has submitted a Biodiversity Impact Calculator suggesting a net biodiversity gain. However, full details of the calculations have not been provided, and while the gains indicated may be considerable for a small site, the overall contribution to biodiversity would be modest which limits the weight that I afford to this factor.
28. Conversely, I have found that the site would not provide a suitable location for housing with regard to its location within the countryside and access to services, and that the development would harm the character and appearance of the area. These matters attract significant weight and outweigh the benefits associated with the proposal.

Conclusion

29. I find for these reasons that the proposal would conflict with the development plan when it is read as a whole, and material considerations do not indicate that a decision contrary to the development plan should be reached. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR