



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 15 June 2021

by Mr James Blackwell LLB (Hons)

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 02 July 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/W/21/3270000

Gardeners Hill Road, Lower Bourne

- 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 Matthew Kavanagh against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref WA/2020/0784, dated 5 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 4 September 2020.
 - The development proposed is a one two-storey three-bed detached house.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposed development would lead to coalescence between Rowledge, Wrecclesham and Boundstone; and
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Coalescence

3. The appeal site lies approximately 70m south of the Built Up Area Boundary of Wrecclesham as defined in the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan 2017 (Neighbourhood Plan). The settlement of Rowledge lies to the west of the appeal site and Boundstone is located to its south.
4. The new dwelling would be located at the western end of Frensham Court, which is a historic estate comprising a small collection of dwellings (the Estate). These dwellings are accessed by a narrow private road off Gardeners Hill Road. At the western end of the Estate, the dwellings are mainly located to the south of the access road. Due to the arrangement of dwellings, there is an identifiable area of open countryside which separates the small cluster of dwellings within the Estate from the built-up area of Wrecclesham to the north. Whilst there is a cottage which lies just north of the access road, this dwelling is surrounded by a significant expanse of garden which contributes positively to this rural gap.
5. The appeal site sits adjacent to a large expanse of fenced grassland lying north of the curtilage to the cottage. The appeal site mainly comprises grassland, woodland and hedgerow, which gives the land a strong verdant quality. As with

the cottage, the verdant quality of the appeal site provides a valuable contribution to the area of countryside which separates the Estate from the built-up areas to the north. This area also forms part of a larger expanse of countryside which sits between the Built Up Area Boundaries of Wrecclesham and Rowledge.

6. Policy FNP11 of the Neighbourhood Plan states that *"any intensification of development in the gaps beyond the defined Built Up Area Boundary which have the effect of reducing the separate identity of distinct areas of [...] Wrecclesham and Rowledge, Boundstone and Rowledge [...] and increasing the coalescence between them would be inappropriate"*.
7. I am satisfied that the proposed development would not lead to coalescence between the settlements of Rowledge and Boundstone, as the appeal site isn't within countryside which directly separates these two areas. However, the position is different between Wrecclesham and Rowledge. The Built Up Area Boundaries to the south of Wrecclesham and to the east of Rowledge are currently safeguarded by an area of undeveloped countryside which sits between the two areas. The appeal site is located within this area and as highlighted above, its verdant quality contributes positively to the openness of the space. The proposed new dwelling would reduce the area of undeveloped land which separates the two settlements, by extending the spread of residential development beyond the southern boundary of Wrecclesham and taking it closer to the eastern boundary of Rowledge. This would increase the level of coalescence between the two areas, which would conflict with Policy FNP11 of the Neighbourhood Plan.
8. Introducing even a single dwelling in this location would also lead to pockets of undeveloped land which would be surrounded by built form, which would arguably become suitable for infill development. This risk is exacerbated by the Baker Oats development just north of the appeal site. Specifically, the development would lead to a pocket of land directly north of the appeal site which would be enclosed by the Built Up Area Boundary of Wrecclesham to the north and the new Baker Oats development directly to its east. Similarly, there would be another pocket of land east of the proposed development, which would become enclosed by the Baker Oats development to its north, Gardeners Hill Road to its east and the other dwellings within the Estate immediately to its south. The risk of infill development within such pockets could lead to the further spread of development outside of Wrecclesham, and in turn risks greater coalescence between Wrecclesham and Rowledge. Once again, this would conflict with Policy FNP11 of the Neighbourhood Plan, which is explicit that even limited development would be inappropriate in such locations, as it can contribute to a cumulative undermining of the effectiveness of these Built Up Area Boundaries.
9. Owing to the existing outbuildings that would be demolished as part of the development, the appellant contends that the proposed development would not lead to coalescence between Wrecclesham and Rowledge, as there would be a net reduction in built form on the appeal site. However, the existing outbuildings are mostly in a state of disrepair and are generally befitting of the agricultural nature of the appeal site (as it has been described by the Council). In my view, they do not give the appeal site any existing sense of domesticity.

10. On this basis, the introduction of the proposed new dwelling would lead to an intensification of residential development between Wrecclesham and Rowledge, which would increase coalescence between the two areas. This would be in direct conflict with Policy FNP11 of the Neighbourhood Plan, which seeks to preserve the separate identity of these distinct areas.

Character and Appearance

11. The appeal site is within an area identified in the Council's Local Plan¹ (Local Plan) as Countryside beyond the Green Belt. Policy RE1 of the Local Plan seeks to safeguard the "*intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside*" within such areas. As highlighted above, the appeal site has a strong verdant quality owing to its areas of grassland, woodland and hedgerow, which is commensurate with this countryside setting.
12. The proposed dwelling would have 3 bedrooms. Its footprint would be sufficiently modest to ensure that ample private garden is retained. In terms of size and scale, it would appear proportionate to the wider appeal site. The dwelling has been designed sympathetically to ensure it would integrate well with its surroundings, through the use of natural materials which complement the rustic agricultural nature of the site. Whilst the design does deviate from the Victorian vernacular of the wider Estate, given the distance of the site from the nearest dwellings on the Estate and the level of seclusion afforded by its mature boundary treatments, I do not consider its design would jar with its immediate surroundings. When considered in isolation, I am therefore satisfied that the design of the proposal responds well to the local distinctiveness of its surroundings.
13. In terms of the wider landscape, the appellant contends that the appeal site is located "*amongst neighbouring residential dwellings*", and that the site is "*predominantly residential in nature*". I disagree with this assessment. The site is located further north than the other dwellings on the Estate, and as a result, it borders open countryside to its north and west, and a large expanse of fenced grassland to its east. There is an orchard south of the appeal site which separates it from the access road. Even accounting for the dwellings on the Estate which are located to the south of the proposed development, the appeal site is therefore surrounded by green space, and cannot be said to be "*amongst neighbouring residential dwellings*" nor "*predominantly residential in nature*". As for the existing built form on the site, as highlighted above, I do not consider that this gives any appearance of domestic curtilage, as it is mostly made up of outbuildings which are in a state of disrepair. The Council's description of the site as agricultural land is therefore more accurate.
14. The proposed development would fundamentally change the agricultural nature of the appeal site to land which is residential in nature. As highlighted above, this would increase the levels of coalescence between Wrecclesham and Rowledge. This coalescence would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, as it would fail to preserve the defined Built-up Area Boundaries of Wrecclesham and Rowledge which are needed to safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the Countryside Beyond the Green Belt. The proposed development would therefore conflict with policies RE1 and TD1 of the Local Plan, policies FNP1, FNP10 and FNP11 of the Neighbourhood Plan, retained policies D1 and D4 of the Waverley Borough Council Local Plan (2002) and the

¹ Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 1: Strategic Policies and Sites (2018)

Farnham Design Statement 2010. Together, these policies and guidance require new development to integrate well with its surroundings through appropriate design which is responsive to the area's distinctive local character.

Other Matters

15. Whilst I note the officer's recommendation was for approval, for the reasons I have outlined above, I disagree with the conclusions reached by the officer relating to the impact of the development on coalescence between Wrecclesham and Rowledge.
16. I agree with the appellant that the location of the proposed development would not be isolated, by virtue of its proximity to other dwellings within the Frensham Court estate. Similarly, I have no concerns regarding the location of the proposed development in terms of access to local services. However, these factors do not provide sufficient benefit to outweigh the harm that would be caused by the additional coalescence between Wrecclesham and Rowledge if the development were to be allowed.

Conclusion

17. The proposed development would conflict with the development plan, as it would lead to increased coalescence between Wrecclesham and Rowledge which would harm the character and appearance of the area. For this reason, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

James Blackwell

INSPECTOR