



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 9 August 2021

by Mr James Blackwell LLB (Hons)

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 August 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/W/21/3275663

Land to the rear of 56-58 Hill Road, Watlington OX49 5AD

- 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 Everport Developments Ltd against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref P20/S4280/FUL, dated 11 November 2020, was refused by notice dated 1 February 2021.
 - The development proposed is the erection of two detached dwellings with associated parking and amenity space provision.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Since determination of the planning application, the 2019 iteration of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) has been superseded. Both parties have had the opportunity to comment on the changes. I have therefore determined this appeal with regard to the current version, issued in July 2021.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located along Hill Road, one of the main roads in and out of the village of Watlington. Most of the built form along this road is situated on the southern side of the road, and is primarily made up of large, detached dwellings set within spacious plots. The houses generally adhere to a strong linear formation and consistent building line, which characterise the settlement pattern of this area.
5. The appeal site is also located within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are designated for the purposes of conserving and enhancing natural beauty, and section 85(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a duty upon me to have regard to these purposes in this decision.
6. The northern side of Hill Road is exclusively made up of undeveloped countryside, which contributes to the natural landscape beauty of the area. The low density of development which is attributed to the large and spacious plots

- of the housing along the southern side of the road also helps conserve the rural and verdant quality of the AONB.
7. The proposed development would introduce two new dwellings on land to the rear of Nos 56–58. Whilst the appeal site is already fenced off from the rear gardens to these properties, it nonetheless comprises land within their boundaries which clearly sits within the linear settlement pattern along the southern side of the road. On the basis that there are no other examples of backland residential development in the immediate vicinity, the sub-division of this land to accommodate the new houses would severely disrupt the clear linear grain of development along the road, which would be disruptive to the wider street scene. The increased urbanisation of this land would also diminish the low-density of development which typifies the area, which would be harmful to the character of the AONB.
 8. Even though the new dwellings would retain ample garden space in themselves, they would be markedly smaller than neighbouring gardens along Hill Road. On the basis that the large and spacious plots which characterise properties along Hill Road play such a fundamental role to the open and verdant quality of the AONB, the subdivision of Nos 56-58 in the manner proposed would seriously diminish this openness, which would again be harmful to the character of the area.
 9. The appeal site currently benefits from an extant planning permission for two garages and associated accommodation above, to be used in conjunction with Nos 56-58. The appellant contends that the visual impact of the proposed development would not be materially different to the impact of the garages were they to be constructed. I cannot agree with this position. The proposed dwellings would be significantly larger than the consented garages, and would therefore cause far greater visual disruption to the openness of the wider landscape. Moreover, ancillary outbuildings are not uncommon in the rear gardens of dwellings along Hill Road. As such, the garages would be in-keeping with the local pattern of development, whereas the new houses would create two additional planning units which would fragment the land to the rear of Nos 56-58, and substantially undermine the established settlement pattern of the area.
 10. For these reasons, I consider that the proposed development would harm the character of the area and the AONB. It would conflict with Policies DES1 and DES2 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2035 (adopted 2020) (Local Plan), which seek to ensure new development respects local context, and responds positively to the existing layout and grain of surrounding development. The development would conflict with Policy ENV1 of the Local Plan, which seeks to protect and enhance the special landscape character and beauty of the Chilterns AONB. The development would also conflict with the Framework (2021), which is explicit that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in such areas. Finally, the development would conflict with Policies P1 and P5 of the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan (2019), which require new development to relate well to the established character of the street scene and the street pattern of the town.

Other Matters

11. Whilst I acknowledge the appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) concluded that the appeal site has a low landscape value and low sensitivity to change, this does not negate the harm that would be caused by the development to the overarching character of the area and the AONB. Moreover, there is a real risk that the proposed development would set a precedent for further backland residential development along Hill Road, which could lead to further urbanisation of the area to the detriment of the rural and verdant qualities of the AONB.
12. I note there is other built form which does punctuate the linear pattern of development along Hill Road, which includes two farms, a nursing home and a doctor's surgery. Nonetheless, these buildings are of a different type, character and scale to the housing proposed, and I do not consider that their presence would justify a departure from the prevailing pattern of housing development in the area.
13. Whilst the proximity of the appeal site to local centre of Watlington would constitute a sustainable location in terms of access to local services, such benefit does not outweigh the harm to the overarching character of the area that has been identified above.
14. When considered in isolation, the proposed dwellings would be of high-quality design which would be consistent with the standard of development in the area. Nonetheless, this neutral factor would again not outweigh the harm that would be caused to the character of the area and the AONB as identified above.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons given, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework (2021), and all other relevant material considerations, the appeal is dismissed.

James Blackwell

INSPECTOR