



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 16 August 2021

by James Blackwell LLB (Hons)

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 August 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/21/3275194

Land to the rear of 32 Woodmarsh, North Bradley, Trowbridge BA14 0SB

- 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 Messrs Griffin and Davies against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref 21/01747/OUT, dated 17 February 2021, was refused by notice dated 15 April 2021.
 - The development proposed is the construction of two detached dwellings and alterations to existing vehicular access.
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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of the planning application, the 2019 iteration of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) has been superseded. The main parties have had the opportunity to comment on the changes. I have therefore determined this appeal with regard to the current version, published in July 2021.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the principle of the proposed development is acceptable in terms of location; and
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

Location of Development

4. The appeal site is located on the edge of North Bradley, a large village on the outer fringe of Trowbridge, and sits behind a row of houses along the north-eastern side of Woodmarsh. Whilst the site is partly used as a builder's yard, much of the area remains undeveloped grassland.
5. Policy CP1 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted 2015) (CS) sets out the overarching settlement strategy for the district, and generally directs development towards built-up areas which are considered to be the most sustainable locations. It establishes a general presumption against

development within areas which fall outside of established settlement boundaries. Policy CP2 of the CS does prescribe certain exceptions where development may be permitted outside of defined settlement limits, however such exceptions are limited to development for employment use, military establishments, tourist facilities, rural exception sites, specialist accommodation and development which supports rural life.

6. Whilst the appeal site is located on the edge of North Bradley, it sits outside of its defined settlement boundary. As such, the presumption against development applies in this instance. None of the exceptions prescribed by Policy CP2 would be relevant to the proposed development.
7. When determined against local policies, the location of the proposed development would therefore not be considered suitable or sustainable. For the reasons outlined above, the development would conflict with Policies CP1 and CP2 of the CS, and would therefore undermine the Council's strategy for the distribution of housing across the district. The development would also conflict with Policy CP29 of the CS, which sets out a detailed settlement vision specific to the Trowbridge community area.

Character and Appearance

8. The appeal site comprises a large expanse of grassland which is punctuated by various sheds and other outbuildings used in conjunction with the builder's yard. Whilst the site sits behind dwellings along Woodmarsh, it is otherwise flanked by open countryside to its sides and rear. This gives the site a strong verdant quality. There are also numerous mature trees and hedgerow in and around the site which further contribute to its green character, commensurate with its semi-rural location.
9. The dwellings nearest to the appeal site along the north-eastern side of Woodmarsh are arranged in a clear ribbon formation, which helps demarcate the settlement boundary of North Bradley. The proposed development would introduce two new houses (together with associated amenity areas and access) behind this ribbon of development, which would be at odds with the established settlement pattern of the village. The introduction of houses in this location would also erode a substantial area of the grassed land to the rear of the dwellings along Woodmarsh, which would harm the semi-rural nature of the area.
10. Whilst I acknowledge the sheds and outbuildings in the immediate vicinity of the new dwellings would be removed to facilitate the development, some of the more substantial buildings used in conjunction with the yard would be retained elsewhere on the wider site. The prevailing character of the wider site as a builder's yard would therefore remain, which would appear incongruous with the new residential dwellings proposed.
11. Whilst I note the proximity of sites allocated for housing which are outside of the settlement limits of North Bradley, the appeal site is within a very clear gap of green space between these allocations and the village's built-up area. Irrespective of the accessibility of such locations to local services and facilities, these allocations mean that remaining areas of green space will become especially important to the preservation of North Bradley's rural identity, and so any further erosion of such areas would again be harmful to its character.

12. For these reasons, the development would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with Policies CP51 and CP57 of the CS which seek to ensure new development integrates properly with an area by responding positively to existing townscape and landscape, particularly in terms of building layouts and arrangement of built form. The development would also conflict with Policy CP29, which highlights the importance of areas of countryside and green space in and around North Bradley to help conserve its rural identity.

Other Matters

13. The Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing, albeit the shortfall is only modest. Nonetheless, paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the Framework (2021) is engaged.
14. Whilst the CS does date back to 2015, the weight to be attached to its policies does not hinge on its age. Rather, paragraph 219 of the Framework is clear that due weight should be given to existing policies according to their degree of consistency with the Framework.
15. Although there is no blanket protection of the countryside in the Framework (nor of areas outside of defined settlement limits), the intrinsic character and beauty of such land is recognised. The conflict between the proposal and Policies CP29, CP51 and CP57, all of which seek to protect the distinct character of an area (which in this case is semi-rural), should therefore be attributed significant weight in this appeal.
16. Similarly, whilst the Framework does not preclude development outside of defined settlement limits, it does highlight the importance of strategic planning for the effective use of land, with a particular emphasis on prioritising sites which have previously been developed. The content of the Framework therefore supports the general thrust of the Core Strategy in terms of location of new housing. Even accounting for the Framework's objective of boosting the supply of housing and the Council's land housing land supply position, the conflict between the proposal and Policies CP1, CP2 and CP29 of the CS should therefore be given moderate weight in this instance.
17. Set against the harm identified, there would be limited social, economic and environmental benefits associated with the proposal. The additional units would make only a minor difference to the overall supply of housing, and the support two extra households would provide to the local economy would not be significant. Moreover, although the removal of some of the existing outbuildings would offer some limited visual improvement to the site, this would be tempered by the erosion of an extensive area of grassland which contributes to the verdant quality of the wider area.
18. Consequently, the adverse impacts of the development in terms of the landscape character of the area and the conflict with the housing strategy for the district would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. As a result, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply in this instance.

Conclusion

19. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which

outweigh this finding. Therefore, for the reasons given, the appeal should be dismissed.

James Blackwell

INSPECTOR