



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 11 August 2021

by H Miles BA(hons), MA, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 September 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Z3825/W/21/3267026

White House Cottage Coolham Road, Coneyhurst RH14 9DH

- 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 B Cort against the decision of Horsham District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/20/1924, dated 2 October 2020, was refused by notice dated 30 November 2020.
 - The development proposed is conversion and alterations to stable barn to create a three-bedroom dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. During the consideration of this appeal the revised National Planning Policy Framework July 2021 (the Framework) has been published. I have invited both main parties to submit comments on the relevance of the Framework to this case.
3. The Local Plan Review 2018 has been referred to in evidence. This policy is in draft and has not been subject to formal examination. Therefore, I am not satisfied that it will be adopted in the form it is presented to me and as such it attracts only limited weight.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area and whether the site is a suitable location for housing with particular regard to the settlement pattern and accessibility.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. The site includes an equestrian barn and sand school with the remainder mainly open grassed land. It is surrounded by open fields, although there is a group of dwellings, including White House Cottage, broadly to the north and a house opposite the appeal site entrance. Nevertheless, given its existing appearance and use, the appeal site relates more closely to the surrounding open countryside land.
6. The barn is a typical rural barn in brickwork and corrugated metal and there is some equestrian paraphernalia around the site including small machinery, trolleys, and stores. Although it is not of any particular architectural merit the

- building and the equipment on the land are nevertheless appropriate in this countryside setting.
7. The proposed development would introduce a significant amount of glazing to the structure, including both doors and windows. Although the materials proposed include timber cladding and the shallow pitched roof would remain, the proposed domestic features mean that the proposal would nevertheless result in a clearly residential appearance.
 8. Furthermore, the associated residential car parking and driveway, paved areas and likely more formal gardens and residential paraphernalia such as garden furniture, play equipment and a washing line contribute to the urban nature of the proposed development. I am not persuaded that the large curtilage would necessarily result in any more domestic belongings than nearby properties with large gardens. However, given their urban nature they would nevertheless result in a notably different character to the current equipment on site and would consequently be harmful to the countryside character of the land.
 9. Glimpsed views of the dwelling would be possible from the road. However, the site is highly visible from nearby houses and therefore this harm would be experienced.
 10. Therefore, the domestic, urban nature of the proposed development would adversely affect the intrinsic character and beauty of this countryside site and surroundings and would not lead to an enhancement of the immediate rural setting through architecture and landscape design.
 11. Consequently, the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. As such, in this respect, it would be contrary to policies 25, 26, 32 and 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015) (HDPF) which together seek high quality design which protects, respect and is sympathetic to the landscape and local character, including with respect to the rural character and undeveloped nature of the countryside, amongst other things.

Suitability of the site for housing

12. Together policies 2, 3 and 4 of the HDPF set out a development hierarchy which seeks to concentrate development within existing settlements and ensure development around the edge of settlements protects the rural character and landscape. The built-up area boundaries consider access to employment, services, and facilities. However, these policies do not exclude development outside the built-up area boundaries and in this regard, Policy 26 of the HDPF sets out specific criteria which must be satisfied for development in the countryside to take place, and also requires the protection of the rural character and undeveloped nature of the countryside. Although these policies do not specifically refer to conversions, they include development and therefore are relevant to this proposal.
13. The site is in the countryside for the purposes of the development plan, and it is not part of an identified settlement. It does not adjoin an existing settlement edge, nor is it allocated in the Local Plan or in a Neighbourhood Plan. Furthermore, I conclude above that the rural landscape would not be maintained. Therefore, even if I were to conclude that the development satisfied points 2-4 of Policy 4 of the HDPF it would not be supported as an

expansion of a settlement in this respect. For these reasons it would also not be in accordance with the identified settlement hierarchy and therefore contrary to point 1 of Policy 2 of the HDPF.

14. Furthermore, I am not provided with detailed evidence that a residential dwelling would be essential to the countryside location and as such the development would be contrary to Policy 26 in this regard. Furthermore, the proposed development would result in harm to the rural character as described above. Therefore, the proposed development would be contrary to Policy 26 of the HDPF for these reasons.
15. Although the site is 2 miles from the built-up area boundary of Billingshurst as the crow flies, this distance does not equate to accessibility. There is a pavement in the vicinity of the site, however it is overgrown and unlit, and I am not directed to any shops and services within easy walking distance.
16. I understand there is a bus stop 1 mile towards Coolham and 1.5 miles towards Billingshurst as well as a public footpath to Billingshurst Station 2 miles away. However, I am not provided with details such as times and locations of the bus service that leads me to conclude that this would be a realistic alternative to use of the car for access to day-to-day services. Furthermore, given their distance and the unlit route to reach public transport it would not provide easy access, particularly for those such as children and the elderly.
17. Due to the scale of the development the harm to the settlement pattern would be small, however there would be notable harm from the siting of housing in this location due to its poor accessibility and the consequences of this, as well as the harm to the countryside character.
18. Accessibility in a rural area differs from that in an urban area. However, this site does not offer a choice of transport modes or limit the need to travel. Therefore, occupiers would be reliant on a private vehicle to meet their day-to-day needs, and therefore the proposed development would not enhance and maintain the vitality of the rural community.
19. Consequently, the proposed development would not be a suitable site for housing with particular regard to the settlement pattern and accessibility. Therefore, it would be contrary to Policies 2, 3, 4 and 26 of the HDPF, the aims of which are set out above.

Other Matters

20. The proposed dwelling is close to other houses at White House Cottage and its neighbours, therefore it would not be an isolated dwelling. As such paragraph 80 of the Framework is not relevant to this decision.
21. I have been presented with a number of cases where conversions outside settlement boundaries have been permitted elsewhere in the Borough¹. These sites are all somewhat distant from the appeal site and I can see that in each of these cases a site specific assessment of the principle of development and the character and appearance of the proposal took place, some of which refer to isolated dwellings and heritage considerations, and no harm was found. I

¹ Barn Home Farmhouse (DC/20/0820), Morelands Barn (DC/20/0039), Copped Hall Farm (DC/19/1257), The Sussex Barn (DC/20/0664), Bassels Farm (DC/17/2888), Furzefield (DC/12/1447), Elenge Plat (DC/15/2447), Chalk Farm (DC/17/2773), New House Farm (DC/18/2329), Beaconhill Croft (DC/18/0249), Holme Farm (DC/15/1251)

have followed this approach. However, these cases are notably different to the case before me now where I do find harm in both these respects. As such, these decisions do not alter my conclusions above.

Planning Balance

22. There is dispute as to whether the Council can demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, and I am presented with a decision from 2019² which finds a 4.8 year supply as well as more up to date appeal decisions where Inspectors conclude that the Council have a 4.2³ year and 4.3 year⁴ supply of deliverable sites. I am not presented with detailed evidence that contradicts these recent findings. Consequently, the evidence before me leads me to conclude that the Council cannot demonstrate a 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites. Therefore, paragraph 11d) of the Framework is engaged.
23. The proposed development would result in the social and economic benefits associated with the provision of a single new dwelling including contributing to the government's aim to significantly boost the supply of housing and reusing an existing structure and providing economic benefits during building works, albeit that these would be temporary. It would be a windfall development on a small site which is said to be deliverable in the short term. This would comply with point 8 of Policy 2 of the HDPF and paragraphs 60, 69, 119, 120, 123 and 124 of the Framework. However due to the size of the development (a single dwelling) such benefits are limited in their scale.
24. The dwelling would use solar power and ground source heating which would comply with point 12 of policy 2 and policy 35 of the HDPF, however measures such as the use of renewable and low carbon energy supply systems are a requirement of policy. It is also put to me that the proposed dwelling would be part of an open eco home trial and that the existing occupants intend to drive fully electric cars using electric from solar panels. These ambitions are admirable, however the occupants of the proposed dwelling may change, and I am provided with no mechanism to secure such matters in perpetuity.
25. On the other hand, the proposed development would cause environmental harm due to the public and permanent harm to the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, contrary to the settlement pattern and would be located where its accessibility would not enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities with a reliance on private vehicles. It would be contrary to development plan policies as set out above and the Framework in these respects.
26. Consequently, the harm identified would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the limited benefits of the proposed development as discussed above. Therefore, the appeal scheme is not sustainable development in the terms of either the Framework or Policy 1 of the HDPF, for which there is a presumption in favour of.

² APP/Z3825/W/19/3227192

³ APP/Z3825/W/20/3257700

⁴ APP/Z3825/W/21/3266503

Conclusion

27. The proposal would not accord with the development plan and there are no other considerations to indicate that the appeal should be determined otherwise. Therefore, for the reasons set out above, this appeal is dismissed.

H Miles

INSPECTOR