
Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 24 August 2021

by Mr S Rennie BSc (Hons), BA (Hons), MA, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4 October 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/E2205/W/20/3272602

The Hollies, Pluckley, ASHFORD, TN27 0ST

- 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 Mrs Patricia Morss against the decision of Ashford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 19/01386/AS, dated 15 October 2019, was refused by notice dated 14 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is to demolish existing redundant buildings and to erect four dwellings with new access, porous hardstanding and associated infrastructure.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issues are (1) whether the proposed dwellings are in an appropriate location (having regard to its position outside of any settlement boundary); the effect of the development on (2) the character and appearance of the area, and also (3) highway safety.

Reasons

Location of Development

3. The site is within the countryside. It is not totally isolated, with some other houses and a pub nearby, but larger settlements, such as Pluckley, are further away. The development is therefore isolated from any of the larger villages for example. In terms of planning policy, Ashford Local Plan policy HOUS5 does allow for new dwellings in the countryside, but only in certain circumstances. The proposed development would not meet any of the exceptions outlined in this policy.
4. The distance from the nearest settlement and the limited public transport services available would likely mean that future occupants would be reliant on private vehicles to access shops and services, for example. This is an unsustainable location for four new dwellings, which would neither minimise the need to travel nor support the transition to a low carbon future, both being required by the National Planning Policy Framework.
5. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy HOUS5 of the Ashford Local Plan as it would be a housing development in a relatively remote area of the countryside, without the necessary circumstances or justification for this.

6. The Council also mentions policy HOUS10, but this relates to the development of residential gardens, which this site is not, being a stable yard. As such, I do not consider this policy as particularly relevant to this proposed development.

Character and Appearance

7. The existing site blends well with the rural setting. It contains stables and other similar structures, generally being single storey with a low profile. However, the proposed dwellings would alter the character of the site significantly, giving it a more formal residential appearance.
8. There are other dwellings in the area, but most are detached set within spacious plots, whereas the proposal is for a two storey terrace. This would appear a more intensive and dense form of development than characteristic of the area. Furthermore, the proposal would require a wide access and significant area of hardstanding, likely to be visible from the road, which would further diminish the rural character of the site.
9. The proposal would result in the loss of much of the site's low-key rural character, which fits well with the low density layout of the area. It would be replaced with a relatively high density development of a short terrace of houses which would erode the positive rural appearance of the area and appear incongruous when considered against the prevailing characteristic of detached dwellings in spacious plots.
10. The proposal would therefore appear harmful to the character and appearance of this rural area and thereby contrary to policies ENV3a, SP1 and SP6 of the Ashford Local Plan, which requires that development has regard to the pattern and distribution of settlements, be of a high quality design, and promotes a positive sense of place, amongst other things.

Highway Safety

11. From the proposed access the visibility for vehicles exiting the site would be limited, especially given the potential speeds (60mph) which other road users could be travelling at. However, this is an established access and use of land.
12. The proposal would change the land-use to residential, with some improvements to the access and visibility also proposed. However, the visibility as required by the Highway Authority cannot be achieved therefore meaning that future occupiers would have sub-standard vision along the highway before exiting the site. I acknowledge that many vehicles travel this road well under the speed limit and that there seems to be good levels of forward visibility on the highway, and indeed the Highways Authority has taken this into account. However, factoring in speeds along the road and all other points raised, the submitted information fails to satisfactorily demonstrate that sufficient and safe levels of visibility can be achieved to the southeast due to a building towards the front boundary of Hollies Farm being an obstruction.
13. The parking and turning provision within the site are sufficient, but without an adequate vision splay in both directions being demonstrated with the submitted evidence I cannot be satisfied that the proposed development would not result in highway safety issues.
14. I acknowledge that the site and its access has probably had numerous vehicles enter and exit down the years connected to the equine business, but the site

currently appears not actively used. Indeed, it is my opinion that the proposed development would likely result in an intensification of use of an access into the site, especially given the remoteness of the site from services and facilities, thereby resulting in more of a dependence on car use.

15. For these reasons the proposal is contrary to policy TRA7 of the Local Plan which states that intensified use of existing accesses onto the road network will not be permitted if a clear risk of road traffic accidents would be likely to result, amongst other things.

Planning Balance

16. The proposal would provide dwellings towards the local housing supply. The size of the houses could mean they are more affordable than others in the area and giving more choice. There would be economic benefits from the construction of the dwellings and support to local services and businesses from future occupiers, which could be considered an efficient use of the site, amongst other potential benefits. I also acknowledge the public support correspondence, which has been taken into consideration.
17. Overall, the proposed development would have modest benefits, limited by the fact it would be relatively minor in scale with only four dwellings proposed. However, these benefits would be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by the harm I have identified above.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Mr S Rennie

INSPECTOR