
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 January 2022

by S Leonard BA (Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 09 February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/B9506/W/21/3282078

Coombe Grange, Coombe Lane, Sway SO41 6BP

- 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 I Hayter against the decision of New Forest National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref 20/00799, dated 30 October 2020, was refused by notice dated 16 March 2021.
 - The development proposed is described as "formation of access onto Pauls Lane to serve semi-detached houses."
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. Since the refusal of the planning application, a revised version of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (the Framework) was published on 20 July 2021. I have taken the revised Framework into account where relevant to my decision

Main Issue

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

Reasons

4. The appeal site lies on the north side of Pauls Lane, within open countryside to the southeast of Sway village. The road has a quiet rural character. It is narrow, unlit, and has no pavements. Its edges are defined by grass verges, incorporating banks and ditches, lined by native hedging and trees. Apart from a group of residential properties fronting part of the south side of the lane, the road mainly comprises fields and paddocks, sporadically interspersed with detached dwellings.
5. The Council has confirmed that the site lies within Landscape Character Area 18: *Sway Pasture and Residential Settlement* and the Landscape Type of *Ancient Forest Farmlands*, according to the *New Forest National Park Landscape Character Assessment* (2015) (the LCA). Significant characteristics of the appeal site locality, as identified within the LCA, include traditional field arrangements surrounded by a dense hedgerow network, and winding leafy lanes.

6. The appeal site forms part of a wider site of a previous rest home which has been redeveloped with two large detached houses and two smaller semi-detached houses. All the dwellings are currently accessed from Coombe Lane, via a former existing access. As such, the approved scheme enables the provision of boundary planting along the Pauls Lane frontage of the development site as a whole, thereby maintaining the tranquil rural character of the western end, and northern side, of the lane.
7. I saw on my site visit, that there are gaps within the existing boundary hedging within the immediate vicinity of the appeal site, including at the position of the proposed access point and to the east of it. This accords with the appellant's supporting report dated 4 August 2021 by Professor Stefan Buczacki.
8. Notwithstanding these gaps, the majority of the Coombe Grange site frontage onto Pauls Lane is characterised by hedging and trees, sited on a verge-side bank. When approaching the appeal site from further east and west along Pauls Lane, notwithstanding the area of thinner hedging and gaps in the vicinity of the proposed access, the prevailing character of the western end of this side of the road is that of uninterrupted hedging/trees.
9. Moreover, the planning permission¹ for the site redevelopment is subject to a requirement to provide additional landscaping. The approved landscaping scheme includes a continuous row of trees along the frontage of the starter homes, alongside low post and rail fencing, thereby reinforcing the existing sparse boundary landscaping, and providing a form of boundary treatment which would be wholly appropriate to this part of the road, and which would enhance the existing rural character of the roadside.
10. Notwithstanding evidence of drainage-related infrastructure at the point of the proposed access, I am not persuaded, on the basis of the evidence before me, which includes Google Mapping imaging which dates back to before the development of the Coombe Grange site, that it would not be possible to retain the existing bank and verge and introduce some form of planting that would result in a continuous soft landscaped boundary along this part of the site.
11. The appeal scheme, however, would result in a permanent break in native boundary planting, verge and bank in front of the starter homes. As such, it would permanently erode an intrinsic element of the historic landscape character identified in the LCA, to the detriment of the visual amenities of the area.
12. Moreover, the proposal would introduce a suburban element into the tranquil, informal, vegetated street scene, which would be at odds with this section of the lane. The overtly residential nature of the proposal would be emphasised by the proposed compacted gravel, or similar, surfacing to be laid across the entrance in place of the existing grassed bank, and the formation of a new drive, turning and parking area to the south of the starter homes, in place of the existing soft landscaped garden.
13. In addition, traffic movements associated with the residential use of the access would further erode the rural nature of this part of the lane by impacting on the tranquility of the locality.

¹ Ref 16/00457

14. I have taken account of the appellant's proposed additional planting to both sides of the access. However, having regard to the planting requirements of the approved scheme, which would need to be carried out regardless of the appeal proposal, the appeal scheme planting would not overcome my concerns in respect of the harm arising from a permanent gap in the boundary landscaping, and it would not wholly screen the new drive, turning and parking areas or the semi-detached houses, in views from the lane.
15. I note that there are other accesses along both sides of Pauls Lane. A number are associated with a linear development of dwellings on the south side of the lane, to the east of the appeal site. As such, they form part of an established residential enclave within part of the lane. Elsewhere, accesses are more rural in nature, predominantly comprising field gates which are appropriate within the prevalent fields. As such, I do not find the circumstances of these accesses to be directly comparable with the appeal proposal, having regard to the location of the appeal site within the lane, and the details of the appeal scheme.
16. I acknowledge the proposed removal, and reseeding, of a large amount of the existing vehicular access to the starter homes, which runs within the northern part of the development site, and would be reseeded. However, this would apply to a currently unmade internal access track, which is not visible from the public realm. The tarmac-surfaced part of the access from Coombe Lane, which also serves the detached houses, would remain unaltered and visible from Coombe Lane. As such, there would be no obvious visual enhancement to the character and appearance of the rural lanes arising from this part of the proposal, and it does not justify or overcome my concerns in respect of the impact of the new access upon the rural character of the area.
17. I note the appellant's view that safe visibility splays are capable of being provided without involving a significant loss of frontage vegetation, given the location of the access near a bend in the lane, the unclassified nature of the lane and associated low traffic speeds. However, being mindful of the Highway Authority's recommended splays, once the access has been established, there is a reasonable prospect that the starter home occupiers may seek later improved visibility and/or convenience when using the access, thereby involving the further removal of frontage landscaping to achieve this.
18. For the above reasons, I conclude that the appeal proposal would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore be contrary to Policies SP7, SP17, DP2 and DP18 of the *New Forest National Park Local Plan 2016-2036* (2019) and the *Sway Village Design Statement* (2013). These policies and guidance seek to ensure that new development comprises high quality design which is contextually appropriate, does not harm, and where possible enhances, key visual features and landscape setting, is compatible with the distinct features and type of landscape in which the development is located, and enhances the local character of the National Park and does not have a suburbanising effect within it.
19. For similar reasons the proposal would not accord with Policies of the Framework which require well-designed places and the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, noting that great weight should be

given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, as set out in Chapters 12 and 15 respectively.

Other Matters

20. I acknowledge the appellant's desire to provide a quicker and more convenient vehicular access for occupiers of the semi-detached houses. However, this does not address, or outweigh, the harm that I have identified in respect of the main issue, contrary to the development plan and the Framework.
21. The Council has raised no objection to the appeal scheme in respect of highway safety. However, this is a requirement of national and local planning policies in any case, and does not outweigh my conclusions on the main issue.

Conclusion

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

S Leonard

INSPECTOR