



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 April 2022

by Helen Davies MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 2nd September 2022.

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/21/3287670

Land at Wakemans, Upper Basildon, Reading RG8 8JE

- 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 Mr Richard Hutton against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 21/01289/OUT, dated 30 April 2021, was refused by notice dated 21 September 2021.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 4no. new dwellings at Land Rear of Wakemans.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The application was made in outline, with the application form stating that access and layout were to be considered, and appearance, scale and landscaping reserved for future consideration. However, proposed elevation drawings were also submitted. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) sets out that where details have been submitted as part of an outline application, they must be treated as forming part of the development for which the application is being made. The exception is where the applicant has made it clear that the details have been submitted for illustration purposes only, which is not the case here. Therefore, in accordance with PPG, the Council determined the application on the basis of access, layout, appearance and scale being considered, with only landscaping reserved for future consideration. This is acknowledged in the appellant grounds of appeal. I have therefore determined the appeal on the basis of only landscaping being reserved for future consideration.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the appeal site would provide a suitable location for new housing.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is a parcel of land adjacent to but outside of the settlement boundary of the village of Upper Basildon. To the west and north of the site is residential development along Wakemans and Pangbourne Road. To the east is an open field, with a section of mature trees to the south. The site, along with much of West Berkshire, is within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The site is currently surfaced mostly in

compacted earth and gravel, contains a number of modest buildings and structures, and appears to be used for domestic parking and storage.

5. Policy ADPP1 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (CS) sets out the broad principles and spatial strategy for development across the area. It seeks to achieve sustainable development by locating most development within or adjacent to settlements included in the settlement hierarchy, where there is good transport accessibility and a range of services. Below the settlement hierarchy, Policy ADPP1 also allows for some limited infill development in smaller villages with settlement boundaries, and appropriate limited development in the countryside. Alongside this, Policy ADPP5 of the CS sets out a strategy of relatively limited housing growth within the AONB. Policy CS1 of the CS directs new homes to be located in accordance with the spatial strategy and area delivery plan policies and hence primarily within settlement boundaries and on other allocated land. Policy C1 of the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (HSA) seeks to control housing in the countryside and states that there is a presumption against new residential development outside of the settlement boundaries of the settlements listed within the policy, with certain exceptions.
6. Upper Basildon is not included in the settlement hierarchy and the site is outside of the Upper Basildon settlement boundary, so in accordance with ADPP1 is classed as being within the open countryside. Upper Basildon is a settlement listed under Policy C1 as having a settlement boundary, so as the appeal site is outside of that settlement boundary there is a presumption against new residential development. I have not been provided with evidence to suggest that the proposal meets any of the exceptions set out under Policy C1 for allowing development in the countryside. One of the exceptions allows for 'limited infill in settlements in the countryside with no defined settlement boundary'. As Upper Basildon does have a settlement boundary, this exception does not apply. That the site is adjacent to the settlement boundary and existing residential development, and has clearly defined boundaries, does not alter the fact that it is outside of the settlement boundary so the proposal fails to accord with Policy C1.
7. The appellant has made reference to paragraphs 119 and 120 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in support of their claim that as previously developed land, the site is in principle acceptable for development. The paragraphs state that "strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or 'brownfield' land", and that "planning decisions should give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes". The strategic policies for housing are set out in the development plan and the site is not within a settlement. Therefore, I do not consider that by virtue of being previously developed land, this site is automatically acceptable in principle for development.
8. Whilst accepting that the site is outside of the settlement boundary, the appellant argues that due to its physical characteristics and relationship to the adjoining settlement and existing housing, the site should be considered as a 'logical extension' to the settlement. They subsequently state that the policies map in the emerging Local Plan Review potentially shows the site to be within the revised settlement boundary. Any revision of the settlement boundary is a

matter for plan-making rather than decision taking and at its current stage of preparation I can afford the emerging Local Plan only limited weight.

9. The site is not isolated, in that it is adjacent to existing housing, but key elements of a sustainable location relate to having access to services and facilities, particularly via walking, cycling and public transport. The appellant states that the site has access to a bus service, a train station 1.5 miles away, and an active Parish Community around the school. The Council state that public transport connections are poor and the village lacks community facilities. I have not been provided with evidence to substantiate either of these positions. However, during my site visit I observed only limited services and facilities in the immediate surrounding area and the road to larger settlements lacks a consistent footway. Consequently, future occupants of the proposed dwellings may be likely to rely heavily on private motor vehicles to access services and facilities, which is the least sustainable form of transport. Therefore, I have no evidence that would lead me to conclude that locating new dwellings at the site, would be in accordance with the overarching aim of the development plan to secure sustainably located development.
10. The proposal fails to comply with the specific requirements of Policy C1 of the HAS and is not in accordance with Policies ADPP1, ADPP5 and CS1 of the CS, which together, amongst other things, seek to secure housing which is sustainably located. The appeal site would not provide a suitable location for new housing and the proposal would erode the overall development plan strategy for housing location.

Planning balance

11. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan policies remain broadly in compliance with the Framework, so I attach substantial weight to the policy conflict set out above.
12. In terms of benefits, the proposal would provide four new dwellings, including smaller dwellings which the appellant states are sought after. The appellant also states that the site would contribute to windfall housing figures. However, I can afford this only limited weight in an area which can demonstrate healthy housing land supply and housing delivery and where the dwellings are not proposed as an affordable housing scheme.
13. There would be short term economic benefits during construction of the dwellings and longer term economic and social benefits would arise from additional residents supporting services in the area. The proposal would tidy up a site which currently has little visual value and I acknowledge the relative lack of public objections and that the design, access and impact on amenity are considered to be acceptable.
14. The Council have not identified any specific impact that the proposal would have on the AONB, beyond a lack of compliance with the spatial strategy set out in Policy ADPP5 of the CS. Having considered the information available to me, I conclude that due to the modest scale and settlement adjacent location of the proposal, it would conserve the natural beauty of the AONB.

15. Taking all of these matters into account, the modest benefits of the proposal would not be sufficient to outweigh the clear policy conflict. There are no material considerations of sufficient weight to justify a decision contrary to the development plan.

Other Matters

16. I am aware of the precedent value of planning decisions and note the reference made to other appeal decisions, the details of which are not before me. The referenced appeals relate to other Council areas and were made under different development plan policies so direct comparisons are hard to make. I have determined this appeal on its own merits, circumstances, and situation, in accordance with the current development plan for West Berkshire District Council.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons given above and taking into account the development plan as a whole and all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Helen Davies

INSPECTOR