



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 January 2023

by Hannah Guest BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 January 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/W/22/3304609

Land adjoining West Farm, Tongham Road, Runfold, Farnham GU10 1PJ

- 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 John Mitchell against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref WA/2021/03002, dated 31 August 2021, was refused by notice dated 14 July 2022.
 - The development proposed is erection of 2 no. three bedroom detached dwellings and 2 no. detached single garages.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The appellant's statement refers to the applicant making a full costs application. However, while the statement mentions that the Heritage Officers comments were not posted to the public file and a copy was not provided, there does not appear to be a fully reasoned or formal cost application before me. Therefore, I have not considered this matter further.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on:
 - the significance of nearby listed buildings, West Farmhouse and barn to the south west; and
 - the intrinsic rural character and beauty of the countryside.

Reasons

Listed Buildings

4. The appeal site is located close to a number of listed buildings, including Grade II listed West Farmhouse and barn¹ to the south west, Grade II* listed Hewitts Farmhouse and Grade II listed Hewitts Kiln.
5. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires me to give special regard to preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

¹ Now known as Christmas Pie Barns.

6. The Council's Heritage Officer concluded that the proposal would not materially impact upon the setting of Hewitts Farmhouse and Hewitts Kiln due to the distance between them. I saw on site that there is very limited intervisibility between the appeal site and these listed buildings, including their settings. They are separated by West Farm Cottage and its associated curtilage, which is relatively large and is bounded by closed board fencing and large trees that restrict views towards these listed buildings. Given this, the proposal would not affect the setting of these listed buildings or their significance.
7. The significance of the listed buildings at West Farmhouse, amongst other things, is derived from the group value of the buildings and structures. Notwithstanding their existing use, their form and composition appear as a traditional historic farmstead. Taking account of this and from my observations on site, it is the rural and open character of the listed building's setting which contributes to the significance of the buildings and is significant in relation to this appeal.
8. Although the appeal site is also some distance from West Farmhouse and barn, nothing separates them. The land is open, and I saw on site that despite there being a tree belt along the boundary of the appeal site, there were clear views between the site and these listed buildings. The listed buildings are experienced from within the appeal site; thus, it forms part of their setting. Although partly screened by trees and other planting, there are also views of West Farmhouse when approaching it from Tongham Road, as far back as the appeal site. Given the appeal site is undeveloped and open, in its current form it makes a positive contribution to this setting and the significance of the listed buildings.
9. The very nature of the proposal, by introducing 2 moderate sized dwellings, and the residential paraphernalia associated with these, into this rural and open setting would harm the significance of the listed buildings. I acknowledge that the proposal seeks to overcome the reasons for refusal relating to a previous scheme and Inspector's dismissal of the appeal. It seeks to address this by only developing half the original site furthest from the listed buildings, thus reducing the amount of residential frontage along Tongham Road. I also recognise that the dwellings would be smaller than those previously proposed as would their associated curtilages and would be positioned closer to West Farm Cottage. However, the proposal would have a similar effect on the significance of the listed buildings. It would still result in the urbanisation of a significant amount of their rural setting by extending the built-up area further into the open countryside and towards them, diminishing the contribution it makes to their significance and causing harm irrespective of the proposal's proximity to them.
10. The proposal includes a landscaping strategy which would enhance the biodiversity of the site and soften the character of the proposal. While landscaping should not be relied upon to hide development that would otherwise be unacceptable, in this case, the landscaping proposed would be in keeping with the verdant character of Tongham Road and would help integrate the proposed dwellings with their surroundings.
11. Without full details of the proposed planting, it is not possible to fully assess how much the proposed dwellings would be screened from views, particularly from Tongham Road. The existing road frontage planting is patchy and not

overly tall. It is likely that even with substantial new planting there would be a period when there would be views of the proposed dwellings, albeit these would likely be limited to their upper floors or roof profiles. Therefore, although the proposed landscaping would reduce the intervisibility between the proposed dwellings and listed buildings, it would not fully address the harm to the significance of the listed buildings that I have identified above.

12. Adjacent to West Farm are two residential buildings. They are set much closer to the listed buildings than the appeal site. I do not have any details before me regarding the previous use of this site, when the properties were built or the permissions that were obtained. However, I saw on site that, while they have domestic features such as glazing, doors and fences, they have simple, single storey forms and wooden clad finishes, which gives them a rural, barn-type appearance, more in keeping with the traditional farmstead appearance and composition of the listed buildings.
13. It may be that the residential waste collection bins for West Farmhouse and its neighbouring buildings are an unattractive feature within the setting of the listed buildings. However, they are not permanent features and could be moved at any time. Whether or not this implies that the baseline protection afforded to the value of West Farmhouse is relatively low, paragraph 199 is clear that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.
14. Overall, for the reasons above, I find the harm to the significance of the listed buildings would be less than substantial. As such, paragraph 202 of the Framework requires this harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
15. In terms of benefits, the proposal would provide 2 dwellings in an accessible location close to local services and facilities, which would contribute towards the borough's housing supply. The Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. Its current five-year housing supply figure is between 4.1 and 4.9 years, which shows there to be a moderate shortfall in supply. However, while the provision of 2 dwellings weighs in favour of the proposal, the contribution would be modest.
16. As mentioned above, paragraph 199 of the Framework gives great weight to the conservation of designated heritage assets including listed buildings. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm. I must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the listed buildings. Given this, the modest contribution the 2 proposed dwellings would make to the housing supply does not outweigh the harm I have identified to the significance of the listed buildings.
17. Accordingly, the proposal would conflict with Policy HA1 of the Waverley Local Plan (Part 1) (2018) (Local Plan) and retained Policy HE3 of the Waverley Local Plan 2002 which seek to conserve or enhance the significance of heritage assets within the borough and the aim of the Framework to conserve and enhance the historic environment.

Landscape Character

18. The landscape character of the immediate area derives from a network of open fields interspersed with houses and other buildings, including commercial uses, that are mostly bounded by hedges and trees, which allow the built form to integrate well with its surroundings. Tongham Road, in terms of landscape, consists of a mixture of these landscaped boundaries, as well as road frontage planting, and open fields. The approach to the appeal site, along Tongham Road has a rural and verdant character and the appeal site, and land adjacent to it, currently provide a gap in the landscape which connects to the open fields and Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) beyond.
19. I understand that the Inspector who determined the previous appeal² at the site considered the proposal would represent a conspicuous encroachment of built residential form and would fail to integrate effectively with the rural nature of its setting. Also, that it would fill a gap between West Farm Cottage and West Farm that would consolidate the linear development along this part of the road, eroding its rural feel.
20. However, the appeal proposal before me is quite different from the one the previous inspector considered. The proposed dwellings are smaller than those previously proposed. They would be located close to the boundary of West Farm Cottage and would be read as forming part of a cluster of buildings with those to the south of the appeal site. This would significantly reduce the intrusion of built form into the open countryside and the amount of frontage onto Tongham Road. While it would consolidate the proposed built form on the appeal site, this would be softened by the proposed landscaping, which would not solely screen the proposed dwellings but would also allow them to integrate with their surroundings and would be in keeping with the landscape character of the immediate area. In line with Policy FNP10 of the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan (2020) (NP), the landscape strategy proposes the use of native species.
21. While the existing gap in the planting would be reduced, the adjacent land would remain open, retaining this feature of the landscape character and would allow views towards the wider open countryside. Furthermore, the dwellings would have a traditional form in keeping with nearby properties which I note the Council considers acceptable in isolation.
22. For the reasons above, the proposal would not harm the intrinsic rural character and beauty of the countryside. It would accord with Policies RE1 and TD1 of the Local Plan, the retained Policies D1 and D4 of the Local Plan 2022 and Policies FNP10 and FNP11 of the NP. These, amongst other things, seek to ensure new development is of a high quality that respects or enhances the distinctive character of the area and landscape in which it is located. It would also accord with the aims of the Framework to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Other Matters

23. There is a reason for refusal relating to the proposals effect on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBHSPA) and I note the appellant's

² APP/R3650/W/19/3230324

willingness to adequately mitigate the impact of the development on the TBHSPA. However, given I am dismissing the appeal due to the harm to the significance of the listed buildings, no pathways to significant likely effects on the TBHSPA would arise from my decision. I therefore do not need to consider this issue any further.

24. I recognise that the proposal is supported by members of the community as the site has been used for rubbish dumping and other undesirable night time activities. However, I have no substantive evidence of this, and there are other means of guarding against such activity.
25. As mentioned above, the appellant contends that the comments of the Heritage Officer were not posted to the public file or provided to them in a timely manner. Whether or not this was the case, I must consider the appeal before me and have found that it would result in harm to the significance of neighbouring listed buildings.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

26. Overall, while I have found the proposal would not harm the intrinsic rural character and beauty of the countryside, it would result in harm to the significance of the Grade II listed West Farmhouse and barn, which is not outweighed by public benefits, contrary to the development plan. Thus, it would conflict with the development plan as a whole.
27. Given the shortfall in housing supply, paragraph 11d) of the Framework falls to be considered. The appeal site would affect the setting and significance of a designated heritage asset. Therefore, in this case, planning permission should be withheld where the application of policies in the Framework that protect these assets provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed, as is the case here.
28. Accordingly, I have found the proposal would conflict with the development plan, read as a whole. Having had regard to all relevant material considerations, it has not been demonstrated that there are any of sufficient weight to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with it. The appeal therefore is dismissed.

Hannah Guest

INSPECTOR