



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 December 2022

by Lewis Condé Msc, Bsc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1st March 2023.

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/22/3300238

Wrens Farm, Little Knowl Hill, Ashford Hill RG19 8BL

- 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 Hailstone against the decision of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/02908/FUL, dated 3 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 17 March 2022.
 - The development proposed is described as 'Erection of new single storey 4 bed dwelling, detached garage with accommodation above, new access and associated landscaping to the site of existing listed Wren Farm Cottage'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development in the banner heading above is taken directly from the original planning application form. However, I note that during the course of the planning application, the scheme was amended to remove the proposed first floor accommodation above the detached garage. I have determined the appeal based on the revised proposal that the Council also made its decision upon.
3. Since the determination of the original application, the Ashford Hill with Headley Neighbourhood Plan (AHHNP) has been made. Both main parties have had appropriate opportunity to comment on the AHHNP during the course of the appeal, and I note that neither party has felt that the neighbourhood plan affects the merits of its case.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on a) the character and appearance of the area; and b) biodiversity.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. The appeal site is located in the countryside and predominantly comprises of a parcel of grassed land that is enclosed by a post and rail fence and high hedge. It sits to the north of the Grade II Listed Wren Cottage¹. The site also

¹ The building is named as 'Wren Cottage' in the Historic England listing description (List Entry Number: 1339765) and in the accompanying heritage statement provided by the appellant. However, I note that the building has also

- incorporates a strip of land measuring approximately 80m in length that runs to the east of Wren Cottage that would provide access from the B3051.
6. The surrounding area is characterised by low density and sparsely patterned development including agricultural and equestrian uses. The landscape is rural in nature, comprising a mix of agricultural fields, with intervening hedgerows and areas of woodland. This results in the area having a pleasant, verdant, quiet, rural character.
 7. The site itself has a rather open, verdant and unspoilt character that I find contributes positively to the rural landscape. This is despite its position whereby it sits between existing dwellings fronting the B3051 and further agricultural buildings to the north.
 8. The proposal would introduce a single storey detached property in a sizeable plot. The size of the plot would be similar to that of nearby dwellings, which although limited in number, tend to also be detached properties set in large plots. Neighbouring dwellings are also laid out in a generally dispersed manner, without consistent building lines. However, I have seen no evidence of backland forms of residential development close to the appeal site.
 9. I recognise that the proposed building would have an agricultural vernacular reflective of its countryside location, whilst neighbouring properties do not have a highly consistent appearance. Nevertheless, the introduction of the proposed dwelling, alongside a significant extent of hardstanding, would erode the verdant feel of the site, urbanising it with built form and related domestic paraphernalia.
 10. Additionally, the proposed dwelling would be considerable in scale and mass. Despite being single storey in nature, it would still have a ridge height of approximately 6m. The overall footprint of the building is also far greater than immediate neighbouring dwellings. Through the incorporation of a u-shaped layout, with a substantial length and depth, the massing of the proposed building would appear uncharacteristically large compared to adjacent dwellings.
 11. Furthermore, the proposal would be located in very close proximity to an adjacent public right of way (PROW) to the west of the site. Even though there is an existing mature high hedge alongside the boundary with the PROW, the scale of the proposal would still be highly appreciable from this public vantage point. I note that the proposed development has been orientated such that the more visually interesting courtyard elevations would face towards the PROW. This would also ensure that the main bulk of the building is set back from the PROW. However, the considerable length and scale of the building would remain apparent. I also appreciate that wider views of the proposed development would be somewhat limited. Nonetheless, the proposed dwelling would be highly prominent from the PROW and given its overall scale it would be visually intrusive within the landscape.
 12. The appellant has highlighted an intention to provide landscaping measures that, alongside softening the proposed built form, would further limit views of the proposal. Be that as it may, I do not consider this would overcome the urbanising effects of the proposed development, whilst landscaping should

been referred to as 'Wrens Farm' and 'Wren Farm Cottage' in various appeal documents submitted by the appellant.

generally not be used to screen unacceptably designed proposals. Particularly since there can be no guarantees that such landscaping will be effective or retained in perpetuity.

13. Overall, I find that the proposal would detract from the rural landscape to the detriment of the character and appearance of the area. The proposed development is therefore contrary to Policies EM1 and EM10 of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (adopted 2016) (Local Plan), the Design and Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (adopted 2018) and the Landscape Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document (adopted 2018) (LBTSPD). Together the policies and guidance, amongst other matters, seek to ensure that development contributes to the character and visual amenity of the area and responds positively to the local context, including its landscape setting. The proposal would also conflict with the aims of the Framework in respect of promoting development that is sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.

Biodiversity

14. Since the determination of the application the appellant has provided a biodiversity net gain assessment prepared by a suitably qualified ecologist. The assessment indicates that a net gain of approximately 15% can be achieved through habitat enhancements to be provided as part of the development proposal. The Council has therefore indicated that, provided any grant of permission includes a condition to secure the relevant enhancements, its concerns with respect to biodiversity would be overcome.
15. Should planning permission be granted, I consider that the use of such a condition would be suitable having regard to Paragraph 56 of the Framework and associated guidance on the use of conditions established within Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
16. Accordingly, I am satisfied that the proposal would comply with Policy EM4 of the Local Plan. This seeks for development proposals to protect biodiversity, including through compensatory measures to ensure no net loss and, where possible, provide a biodiversity net gain. It would also accord with the aims of the Framework, the LBTSPD, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, and the Environment Act 2021 in respect of conserving the natural environment and providing net gains for biodiversity.

Other Matters

17. As previously indicated the appeal site lies to the north of the Grade II Listed Wren Cottage. I note that the Council identified that the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the listed building, but that this would be outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal. As such, it did not refuse the proposal on heritage grounds. Nevertheless, under Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, I am required to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
18. Paragraphs 199 and 200 of the Framework says when considering the impact of new development on the significance of a listed building, great weight should be given to its conservation, and adds that significance can be harmed or lost by development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any

harm should require clear and convincing justification. The Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) also advises that the extent and importance of setting is not confined merely to visual considerations and views. Although views play an important part, the way in which an asset is experienced in its setting is influenced by spatial association and by an understanding of the historic relationship between places.

19. I find that the significance of Wren Cottage lies in its age, architectural detailing, and historic associations with the rural area. In this instance, I am satisfied that the level of separation between the proposed dwelling and the listed building, including the positioning of existing outbuildings, is such that they would not share an intimate relationship, including visually. Additionally, Wren Cottage would continue to be set in a spacious plot with land befitting of its rural past.
20. Consequently, subject to the use of conditions on the grant of any permission (including relating to approval of sample materials and the proposed access gate/pier design), I am satisfied that the development would preserve the setting of the listed building. It would have a neutral effect that would have no material impact on its setting and significance, nor lessen the ability to identify its historic nature.
21. I note the appellant's concerns surrounding the manner in which the Council determined the original application. In particular due to the pre-application advice received and also the Council's assessment of the proposals against Policy EM1. However, the appeal has been determined on its own merits.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

22. The Council is unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing and accepts that its policies relating to housing delivery are therefore out-of-date. Accordingly, the Council did not seek to refuse permission based on the development not complying with its spatial strategy for new housing development.
23. Paragraph 11(d) of the Framework therefore applies. This requires an assessment of the proposal against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole. The Framework sets an expectation that development should be well designed so that it is sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. Furthermore, the Framework recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, which would be harmed by the proposal. Policies EM1 and EM10 of the Local Plan are therefore consistent with the Framework. Even taking account of the Council's failure to deliver sufficient housing, the conflict between the proposal and the development plan should be given significant weight in this instance.
24. Set against the identified harm, an additional dwelling would provide economic benefits through the creation of employment during the construction process, and further spend of residents in the local economy. However, given the proposal is for only a single dwelling, such benefits would be limited. Similarly, the development would also have social benefits through the provision of a dwelling and would contribute towards the Council's shortfall in housing supply. Again, however, the benefits associated with a single dwelling would be limited.

25. The appellant has demonstrated that the proposal could incorporate biodiversity net gains of approximately 15%. Evidence has also been provided to indicate that the development would be constructed of sustainable materials and would incorporate various measures to ensure it is highly energy efficient. I afford these environmental matters modest positive weight.
26. Overall, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, I find that the adverse impacts of the proposed development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Consequently, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply.

Conclusion

27. The appeal scheme conflicts with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations, including the Framework's provisions, which outweigh this finding. Therefore, for the reasons given above and considering all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Lewis Condé

INSPECTOR