



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 July 2023

by Lewis Condé BSc (Hons), MSc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 July 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/23/3315930

Rear of 1 Mole Road, Wokingham, Sindlesham RG41 5DJ

- 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 Ben Johnson against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 222515, dated 16 August 2022, was refused by notice dated 5 October 2022.
 - The development proposed is described as 'Outline planning application for the proposed erection of a single storey residential dwelling with associated curtilage (all matters reserved)'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The planning application was submitted in outline with all matters reserved for future consideration. I have determined the appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises land that was formerly used as part of the rear garden of 1 Mole Road, although I understand it has previously been separated and utilised for other purposes. The site is accessed via a gap between No.1 Mole Road and an adjacent property 'Toad Cottage'.
5. The appeal site sits predominantly behind a row of residential properties that vary in scale and appearance. However, neighbouring residential properties along Mole Road share a consistent building line and frontage on to the streetscene. They also tend to be served by spacious rear gardens. Whilst the appeal site may no longer form part of the rear garden of No. 1 Mole Road, the land nevertheless provides a sense of space and relief that, due to its siting and largely vegetated state, visually ties in with the rear gardens of neighbouring properties.
6. The surrounding area represents a generally sustainable location for residential development, and has a varied character. Despite this, the backland siting of the proposed residential development would be uncharacteristic of its surroundings.

7. The proposal would not be prominent from public vantage points, whilst I recognise as part of a future reserved matters application, the appearance of the proposed dwelling could replicate that of existing bungalows along the street. Be that as it may, the tandem nature of the proposal and lack of street frontage that the dwelling would display would be at odds with existing surrounding residential development.
8. In coming to the above views, I recognise that residential properties along the street already contain built development to their rear, but this appears to be in the form of relatively small, ancillary domestic buildings. Similarly, I observed that the commercial uses to the south of the site were also served by deep plots and contained separate buildings that were set back from the road, behind main frontage buildings. However, the commercial nature of uses alongside their layouts, provide these properties with a distinctly different quality and character to the appeal site and the predominant surrounding residential elements. Indeed, I do not consider that cues taken from the layout arrangements of the nearby commercial uses would reflect positively, if replicated at the appeal site.
9. For the above reasons, based on the indicative details, I am not satisfied the proposed development could be sensitively accommodated on the appeal site and integrate well with its surroundings. As such, I find it would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. The proposed development would therefore conflict with Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Council Local Development Framework – Core Strategy Development Plan Document (adopted 2010) (Core Strategy) and Policies CC01 and TB06 of the Wokingham Borough Development Plan – Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (adopted 2014) (MDD). Together, amongst other matters, these policies seek to ensure that development is of a high-quality design, sensitive to its context, that would maintain or improve the character and appearance of the area.
10. The proposal would also not adhere to the aims of the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (adopted 2012) or Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which, amongst other matters, also seek to promote good design that is sympathetic to local character.

Other Matters

11. It has been highlighted that the appellant has a strong family connection to the area and that the proposal would enable him to continue to live in the area. However, there is no particular need identified as to why it is necessary for the appellant to live in this specific location. There is also no robust evidence before me to suggest that the proposal is the only suitable option to enable the appellant to live locally. Accordingly, I give this matter negligible weight.
12. I have been made aware of the previous appeal decision at the site¹, that was for a similar proposal and determined against the same development plan policies. Despite this, there are material differences between the current scheme and the previously dismissed appeal. These includes the removal of a garage from the proposal and the Council's housing land supply position. Whilst

¹ APP/X0360/W/18/3205086

I have noted the previous decision, the appeal scheme has been considered on its own merits.

13. I also note the support of a neighbouring resident. However, for reasons outline above, I do not consider the proposal would improve the character of the area. Whilst support for the proposal (or a lack of objections) does not provide suitable justification to allow unacceptable development.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

14. The Council accepts that it cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land. This takes me to paragraph 11 of the Framework which states, for this purpose and taking into account my earlier findings, that planning permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole.
15. The Framework expects development to be visually attractive as a result of good layout, whilst maintaining a strong sense of place using the arrangement of streets to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live. Consequently, I find that Core Strategy Policies CP1 and CP3 and MDD Policies CC01 and TB06 are consistent with the aims of the Framework. Even considering the Council's failure to deliver sufficient housing, the conflict between the appeal proposal and the development plan should be given significant weight.
16. Set against the harm identified would be limited benefits associated with the proposal, including its sustainable location and the use of currently underutilised land. There would also be socio-economic benefits associated with the delivery of the proposed dwelling, however, these would again be limited given the scale of the proposal. Similarly, although an additional unit (which may be deliverable in the short term) would positively add to the supply of housing, it would make little difference to the overall delivery of housing in the authority area.
17. Bringing the above together, I find that the adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the area would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. As such, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply.
18. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which justify a decision other than in accordance with it. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Lewis Condé

INSPECTOR