



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 June 2023

by H Wilkinson BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 August 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/22/3306843

Land at Moyglare Farm, Stoney Heath, Baughurst, Hampshire, RG26 5SN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant permission in principle.
 - The appeal is made by Dr. L Mountford against the decision of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/02061/PIP, dated 17 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 16 March 2022.
 - The development proposed is described as an 'application for permission in principle for residential development for a minimum of 1 no. and a maximum of 2no. dwellings'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that permission in principle is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The permission in principle consent route has two stages: the first stage (or 'permission in principle') establishes whether a site is suitable in principle, and the second stage ('technical details consent') is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. The appeal relates to the first of these two stages.
3. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent Technical Details Consent application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly. I have had regard to the submitted block plan for indicative purposes only.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the site location is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development.

Reasons

5. The appeal site comprises a modest parcel of agricultural land which abuts the boundary of Moyglare Farm. A public bridleway runs along the side boundary of the site with semi-detached cottages on the far side of the intervening agricultural land. For the purposes of Policy SS1 of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011 to 2029 (Local Plan), the appeal site is located within the countryside.
6. Consistent with the North Sherbourne Landscape Character Area (LCA) Baughurst Road is characterised by a patchwork of mixed farmland, woodland

and scattered dwellings. In this regard, the site is a contributor to the rural development pattern identified within the LCA assessment and positively contributes to the character and appearance of the host landscape. Whilst located outside of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the evidence before me indicates that the appeal site lies within the setting of the AONB and contributes to the expansive and tranquil nature of the protected landscape. In such locations, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that development should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.

7. I observed at my site visit that there are sporadic, residential clusters along Baughurst Road. However, the stretch of road to the northwest and southeast of the appeal site is characterised predominantly by open fields and scattered dwellings which are both physically and visually separated by the intervening parcels of agricultural land. These parcels provide a sense of openness and reinforce the rural character of the area as perceived by users of the highway and bridleway.
8. I recognise that a residential development of this scale, and in this location would not be wholly discordant with the sporadic development pattern and that detailed design matters would be subject to future consideration. However, the proposal would nevertheless introduce built form and domestic paraphernalia onto land which is otherwise undeveloped and devoid of buildings. In doing so, the proposal would result in the encroachment of development into a rural area.
9. Moreover, the proposal would reduce the open, verdant gap between Moyglare Farmhouse and the nearby semi-detached cottages and as a consequence would erode the open character of the area in which the appeal development would be appreciated. Accordingly, I find that the appeal proposal would contribute to the undesirable suburbanisation of the countryside to the detriment of its intrinsic character and beauty. In this regard, the harm to the character and appearance of the area would be significant.
10. In coming to this view, I acknowledge that the Council does not consider the appeal site to be isolated for the purpose of Paragraph 80 of the Framework. In addition, I recognise that the appeal development would not be located within a flood risk area, or within proximity of any protected buildings and would be reasonably well screened by the existing vegetation which would be retained. Additional landscaping could also be secured by condition to strengthen the screening opportunities. However, these factors would fail to address the fundamental harm that would result from the introduction of built form at the appeal site. Thus, they do not persuade me that the development would be justified on this basis.
11. My attention has been drawn to several decisions taken by the Council, which the appellant submits relate to housing development of a similar scale and are located within the countryside¹. The respective sites are located a reasonable distance from the appeal site and therefore, they do not form part of the immediate context which is an important consideration here. Turning to the appeal decision² referenced by the appellant, it is noted that the undersupply of housing is a common factor. However, it appears to me that the main issue in

¹ 20/01911/FUL (and 17/00545/FUL), 21/01676/FUL and 14/02732

² APP/H1705/W/19/3229057

that case related to the location of the site within the open countryside and, in reaching their decision, the Inspector concluded that the presumption in favour of sustainable development applied. For reasons I will address later in this decision, this is not so in this case. Consequently, whilst having had regard to the examples provided, they do not lead me to a different conclusion.

12. Accordingly, I find that the appeal proposal would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area, including the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Consequently, the site location is not suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development and thus conflicts with Policy EM1 of the Local Plan. Amongst other aspects, this policy indicates that proposals must respect, enhance and not be detrimental to the character or visual amenity of the landscape having particular regard to the qualities identified within the LCA assessment.

Other Considerations

13. It has been put to me by the appellant that the appeal proposal would provide an appropriate mix of housing, including accessible and adaptable accommodation and would bring short-term benefits in terms of construction expenditure and employment. I also recognise that the proposal would contribute to the local economy and viability of local services in the surrounding villages. However, the proposed development would provide two extra households at most. As such, when set against the harm identified, the economic and social benefits would be limited. Moreover, the provision of two additional dwellings would make little difference to the overall supply of housing within the borough.

Planning Balance

14. The Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. However, the evidenced shortfall in this instance could not be reasonably described as substantial. In these circumstances footnote 8 of the Framework establishes that the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date. Consequently, permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. The site is not within a protected area.
15. Whilst I note the appellant's comments with regard to Policies SS1, SS4 and SS6, these policies are not a matter of dispute between the parties. Paragraph 219 of the Framework makes it clear that due weight should be given to existing policies according to their degree of consistency with the Framework. The Framework seeks to ensure that development is sympathetic to local character, including its landscape setting whilst Paragraph 174 acknowledges the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Therefore, the conflict between the proposal and Policy EM1 of the Local Plan should be given significant weight in this appeal.
16. Notwithstanding the objective of significantly boosting the supply of housing as set out in the Framework and the Council's housing land supply position, the benefits associated with the proposed development as set out above would be limited. The Framework also gives substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for housing rather than land in the

countryside and further seeks to safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the rural landscape.

17. Consequently, the adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area, including the setting of the AONB would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. As a result, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply.

Conclusion

18. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as whole and there are no other material considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which outweigh this finding. Therefore, for the reasons given, the appeal is dismissed.

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INSPECTOR