



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 July 2023

by Lewis Condé Msc, Bsc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 06 November 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/23/3316420

Land at Church Lane, Church Lane, Highclere RG20 9RG

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application planning permission
 - The appeal is made by Mr Simon Haskett, Belgrave Homes, against Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 22/02028/FUL, is dated 19 July 2022.
 - The development proposed is 'Erection of 4no. semi detached dwellings with access and parking'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Although the Council did not issue a decision on the application, it has provided a statement setting out the reason why it would have refused planning permission. This has informed the main issue of the appeal.
3. Following the appellant's submission of a revised Biodiversity Net Gain Technical Note, the Council has indicated that it no longer seeks to pursue a reason for refusal in relation to the effects of the proposal on biodiversity. From the information before me, I have no reason to take a contrary view.

Main Issue

4. In light of the above, the main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area, including the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

5. The appeal site encompasses a broadly rectangular field which I understand to be in equestrian use. It lies to the east of the A343 on its crossroad with Church Lane. The site is mainly grassed with the land falling gently to its eastern boundary, which is marked by post and rail fencing. Beyond this boundary lies a combination of residential dwellings, as well as a small collection of open fields that are enclosed by woodland. The remaining boundaries of the site are flanked by mature trees along with understorey vegetation.
6. Highclere contains numerous dwellings, many of which are laid out in an informal, but broadly linear arrangement, alongside the A343. This includes to both the north and south of the appeal site, as well as on the opposite side of the highway. The nearby built form is low density, primarily comprising large,

detached dwellings, set within sizeable plots containing mature vegetation. As such, there is a spacious, verdant, and highly rural character to the area, despite the presence of the A343 and neighbouring dwellings.

7. The appeal site, along with the whole of Highclere and much of the surrounding area, is located within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Hampshire County Council Integrated Character Assessment (May 2012) identifies that the site lies within landscape character area (LCA) 2A 'Highclere Chase'.
8. The site does not form part of an expansive landscape in which long range views can be appreciated. Adjacent residential development also somewhat reduces the landscape sensitivity of the appeal site. Nevertheless, it remains part of a network of small fields that is largely defined by vegetated boundaries and further enclosed by wider woodland giving it an intimate character, thereby aligning with some of the key characteristics of the LCA. Furthermore, the site also adds to the spacious, verdant character of the area, reinforcing the rural setting of Highclere. I therefore find that the site makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area and wider AONB, albeit a rather modest one.
9. Paragraph 176 of the Framework sets out that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.
10. The proposed dwellings would be of a generally traditional appearance and their materials and detailing would share broad similarities with other dwellings found nearby. I also appreciate that the proposal and its juxtaposition to other dwellings, would mean that residential development of the site itself would not be an alien addition within the landscape. Indeed, the proposal would continue the linear pattern of development along the A343, with the site appearing as a logical location for development given its relationship to adjacent built form.
11. However, the proposed introduction of four, large, semi-detached dwellings, together with the likely level of associated paraphernalia that they would attract (e.g. parked cars, boundary fencing, extent of hardstanding etc), would erode the rather soft, verdant qualities of the site. The proposed level of development would be of a higher density than its immediate surrounding context. Moreover, it would involve a rather formal layout, including being dominated by large areas of vehicle hardstanding. This would not integrate well with the far more spacious and organic arrangements of surrounding dwellings. The proposed development would therefore have a rather harsh urbanising effect, to the detriment of the rural character of the area.
12. It was clear from my observations on site and the appellant's submitted Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) that in visual terms, the site is relatively well contained, due to boundary vegetation. As such, only localised views of the proposal would be available, principally restricted to those from along the A343, whereby the site is also seen in the context of adjacent built development. However, this does not validate the delivery of development that is uncharacteristic of its surrounding context.
13. I also appreciate that much of the boundary vegetation is proposed to be largely retained and could be reinforced through additional landscaping measures, thereby further filtering views of the proposal. Be that as it may,

views of the proposal, albeit limited, would remain. The proposed development would also be more prominent during winter months when vegetation is not in full leaf. Additional landscaping would not compensate for the urbanising effect of the proposal, nor should landscaping be used to screen unacceptable development, particularly as its retention in perpetuity cannot be guaranteed.

14. Overall, I find that the proposed development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area, with consequent harm to the AONB. Although relatively minor, the adverse impacts of the proposal would not conserve and enhance the AONB, contrary to the expectations of S85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. The appeal scheme would also be at odds with the requirements of Policies E1 and E10 of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011 – 2019 (adopted 2016) (the Local Plan), as supported by the Landscape, Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document (adopted 2018). Together, amongst other matters, these policies and guidance seek to secure development that is of an appropriate design quality that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area, including its local distinctiveness.
15. Likewise, the proposal is contrary to the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in respect of promoting development that is sympathetic to local character and conserves and enhances the landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs.

Other Matters

16. The appellant has attempted to engage in constructive dialogue with the Council and Parish Council, including by way of pre-application consultation and I note the feedback that was received. I am also mindful that the proposed scheme was amended to include smaller units to reflect details of local housing need. However, it remains that I find the proposed scheme would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and the AONB.
17. Given my findings in relation to the proposal's impacts on the character and appearance of the area, I do not consider that it makes optimal use of the site and therefore does not draw support from the Framework in this respect.
18. I am satisfied that the proposal would not harmfully impact on the setting of Highclere Park. This is due to the appeal site not having a substantive physical or visual connection to the registered Park and Garden, whilst the proposal would not result in additional built form encroaching nearer to Highclere Park than existing. However, this does not overcome my above concerns.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

19. The proposal would make a modest contribution to housing in an area where the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. There would also be socio-economic benefits associated with the provision of four dwellings including contributing towards local housing needs.
20. However, the Framework sets an expectation that development should be well designed and sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. Policies EM1 and EM10 of the Local Plan are therefore consistent with the Framework, even accounting for the Council's failure to deliver sufficient housing. Furthermore, in accordance with footnote 7 of the Framework, as I have found that the scheme would neither preserve nor

enhance the character or appearance of the AONB, it is a case that the policies in the Framework provide a clear reason to dismiss the appeal.

21. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and there are no material considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which outweigh the conflict. Accordingly, the appeal is dismissed and planning permission is refused.

Lewis Condé

INSPECTOR