



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 January 2024

by R J Redford MTCP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 February 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/23/3321532

Land at Woods Lane, Cliddesden, Hampshire

- 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 Portsmouth Estates against the decision of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 22/01551/PIP, dated 27 May 2022, was refused by notice dated 23 March 2023.
 - The development proposed is for the erection of up to 9 dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The appeal site does not have a postal address. For clarity it is located on the south side of Woods Lane, to the west of the village of Cliddesden.
3. The proposal is for permission in principle. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that this is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The permission in principle consent route has 2 stages and a planning permission is only created once both stages have been completed. The first stage, permission in principle, establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle, and the second stage, Technical Details Consent (TDC), is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these 2 stages.
4. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted¹. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent TDC application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly, with regard that conditions cannot be applied to a permission in principle decision.
5. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was updated in December 2023. The main parties have been given an opportunity to comment on this, so the revised version has been referred to in this decision.

Background and Main Issues

6. Due to the recent changes in the Framework, there is the potential for housing land supply to be measured in relation to the progression of a Council's emerging development plan. The Council in this instance has put forward a case that it can now meet the required housing land supply, therefore

¹ PPG Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 58-012-20180615

paragraph 11d) of the Framework is no longer relevant. Accordingly, the proposal is considered by the Council to fail to comply with strategic policies SS1 and SS6 of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (LP). The appellant has had opportunity to respond to this evidence and does not agree with the Council's housing land supply figures.

7. It is evident from the officer report that the proposal was considered against the afore mentioned policies in some detail, therefore I do not consider their introduction within this late-stage evidence as being unfair. Accordingly, I will assess the proposal against them and deal with the housing land supply and the weighting which should be given to individual development plan policies within the planning balance.
8. Therefore, the main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, with specific regard to its location, the proposed land use, and the amount of development; and
 - whether the location of the appeal site is a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to relevant local policies relating to development in the countryside.

Reasons

Character and appearance

9. The appeal site is part of a much larger field which forms part of the buffer between the village of Cliddesden and the M3 and Basingstoke. The portion of the field proposed as the appeal site is immediately adjacent to the edge of the village and set back behind 2 dwellings. It is broadly rectangular in shape with Woods Lane and residential dwellings abutting it on 2 sides. The boundary with Woods Lane is banked and topped with mature hedging and trees. Nevertheless, the field can be glimpsed through gaps in the hedge, as observed on my site visit when the plants and trees were not in leaf, and from the field gate.
10. On the opposite side of the donor field to the appeal site is a series of covered reservoirs which include some large, raised structures. This area is semi-enclosed by a mix of tall trees and hedging, thus partially screening the site from Broadmere and Farleigh Hill. However, due to the topography of the area the site is still visible from across the donor field and the fields between it and the M3.
11. The character of Cliddesden itself is informed by a concentration of development towards the centre of the village where 2 road corridors bisect. Mainly residential development then follows the roads linearly out towards the village edges constituting a gentle transition from village to countryside. Given its open, rural character, the field makes a positive contribution to the setting of the village by enforcing the gentle transition from the countryside into the built-up part of the settlement.
12. The proposal would introduce residential development onto the field and would be visually prominent from the road into the village, as well as across the donor field and those between it and the M3. As such it would change the character and appearance of the site and the edge of the village.

13. When considering the maximum number of dwellings proposed, the amount of development required including access, parking areas and gardens, would be significant. Due to the shape of the appeal site, and its relatively constrained entrance point, any layout for a quantity of dwellings towards the upper end of the range would require a substantial access road into the site creating an insular and somewhat suburbanised form of development. Thereby it would fail to integrate with the pattern of development along Woods Lane and the transitional location of the appeal site at the edge of the village. It would not, therefore, respect the rural setting of Cliddesden.
14. It is noted that there are some examples of such development already within Cliddesden, however they would appear to be within the village rather than at its edge or on previously developed land. It is also acknowledged that the appeal site is not within one of the green fingers, as designated in the Cliddesden Village Design Statement (VDS), which are considered critical to the landscape setting of the village. Nevertheless, these points do not alter my findings.
15. Consequently, the upper range of the development proposed in this location could significantly and permanently harm the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would not therefore comply with LP Policies EM1 and EM10, as far as they seek to ensure high quality development which is sympathetic to its surroundings. It would also fail to align with the general principles set out within the Landscape, Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document and the VDS guidance.

Suitability of the location

16. The local strategy for housing delivery is set out in LP Policy SS1. It seeks to focus development to within settlement boundaries but does provide exceptions with reference to other LP policies. Specifically relevant to this case is LP Policy SS6 which sets out the criteria for when new housing in the countryside could be permissible. This is because the appeal site, although adjacent to the settlement boundary of Cliddesden, is considered within the countryside.
17. Criteria e) of LP Policy SS6 allows for small-scale residential developments which meet a local need, are well related to an existing settlement, and would respect the character, appearance, and qualities of their surroundings. The supporting text for this policy gives guidance as to what could be considered a small-scale development, stating it would provide a net increase of 4 dwellings or fewer.
18. In terms of local need, the officer report states that LP Policy SS5 sets out the parameters for neighbourhood planning in terms of housing requirements and has identified that Cliddesden has a requirement for at least 10 dwellings. However, the officer report confirms that the village does not have a neighbourhood plan at a sufficiently advanced stage to provide these houses nor be considered as part of the development plan. Accordingly, I am satisfied that in this instance there is a policy defined local need for additional housing in Cliddesden and there is nothing before me to state it has been met or significantly exceeded.
19. It is also acknowledged that the appeal site is well related to Cliddesden. However, as set out in the first main issue, the proposal would fail to respect

the character and appearance of the area, and as the proposal could provide more than a net increase of 4 dwellings could be considered larger than a small-scale development. Therefore, the proposal would fail to comply with LP Policy SS6, and by default SS1.

Other Matters

20. The Council have gone to some lengths to explore the accessibility of the site and potential reliance on the private car, although stopping short to refuse it on these grounds. It is acknowledged that Woods Lane is a narrow, non-lit country road without pavements, and that the bus stop at the centre of the village is over 500m away with a limited service. Nevertheless, as noted during my site visit, it would only be a short distance along a reasonably straight section of road for pedestrians or cyclists to reach the M3 bridge and the well-lit and accessible edges of Basingstoke, including designated cycle and foot paths leading towards the town and its public transport options. I therefore find the accessibility of the site and potential reliance on the private car to not be so detrimental as to be considered harmful in this instance.
21. In relation to the loss of agricultural land, the Council have considered this loss to not be deemed 'significant' when viewed in context of the available agricultural land in the area, and there is nothing before me which would require me to conclude otherwise.
22. Other concerns have been raised in relation to affordable housing, the climate emergency, the potential of piecemeal development, health impacts from the proximity to the M3, the living conditions of occupants of adjacent properties, wildlife, road user safety, and the need for innovative, environmentally based design. I have taken account of these and where they would not be dealt with under the TDC application, consider they do not affect my findings on the main issues.

Planning Balance

23. It is evident that the main parties do not agree in terms of housing land supply. However, if I were to take the appellant's figure of 3.67 years and as the appeal site is not within a protected area nor includes assets of particular importance, it would be necessary to apply paragraph 11d)ii) of the Framework. On that basis the conflict with LP Policies SS1 and SS6, as policies which relate to housing supply, carries little weight.
24. In this context the proposal would provide up to 9 dwellings reasonably quickly, and the Framework seeks to boost significantly the supply of housing whilst recognising the importance of smaller sites in meeting the housing requirement of an area. This along with the capability of the proposal to provide biodiversity enhancements, some economic benefits both with jobs during the construction stage and new occupants spending within the local area, and energy efficient homes, would represent the benefits of the proposed scheme, which when considered together would carry moderate weight.
25. The lack of harm identified in relation to accessibility, private car use and the loss of agricultural land would be considered neutrally within the balance.
26. I have however found harm in relation to character and appearance, and housing provision should not come at the cost of the overall quality of an area. A position supported by Paragraph 135 of the Framework. Therefore, the

conflict with Policies EM1 and EM10 carries considerable weight. Consequently, the adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

Conclusion

27. Therefore, for the reasons given above, having considered the development plan as a whole along with all other relevant material considerations including the approach in the Framework, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

RJ Redford

INSPECTOR