



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 February 2024

by Stewart Glassar BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 March 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/W/23/3326981

**Sedgehurst, Tickners Heath, Dunsfold Road, Alfold, Cranleigh, Surrey
GU6 8HU**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr David Cockbill against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is WA/2023/01015, dated 17 April 2023, was refused by notice dated 21 June 2023.
 - The development proposed is described as the 'Erection of 1 no. dwelling following demolition of existing non-agricultural buildings; revised application further to WA/2022/02267'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by David Cockbill against Waverley Borough Council. That application is the subject of a separate decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. A revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published by the Government after the Council's decision but before the appeal came before me. It does not raise any new considerations in relation to this appeal. Where I have referred to specific paragraphs of the Framework, the numbering used is that of the December 2023 version.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are a) whether or not the site is an appropriate location for housing; and b) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location

5. The Framework sets out at Paragraph 84 that planning decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside except in certain circumstances. The appellant does not contend that any of these circumstances apply in this case but rather that the proposed dwelling would not be isolated.
6. According to the Court of Appeal in *Braintree DC v SSCLG, Greyread Ltd & Granville Developments Ltd* [2018] EWCA (Civ 610) an isolated home in the

countryside simply connotes a dwelling that is physically separate or remote from a settlement. However, the Framework does not specifically refer to settlement boundaries and so whether a site is isolated is dependent on the site-specific circumstances and is a matter of planning judgement.

7. The appeal site forms part of the wider grounds of Sedgehurst, a large, detached period dwelling within the open countryside. The existing dwelling and the appeal site are accessed from a long, unmade lane that connects through to Dunsfold Road. There is one other nearby dwelling, which I estimated from the site visit to be located some 500m to the northwest of Sedgehurst, close to where the access lane meets Dunsfold Road.
8. The proposed dwelling would not therefore be close to any other dwellings or buildings other than Sedgehurst and its existing outbuildings. Thus, Sedgehurst and the appeal site are isolated and are in a location that offers a sense of remoteness with no services or facilities within close proximity.
9. The appellant refers to the Braintree judgement in relation to the lack of services not necessarily ruling out a proposal. However, the consideration in that case was in relation to whether a cluster of dwellings or hamlet without services could be considered a settlement. As such it is not directly comparable with the present case, which would result in there being just two dwellings, rather than a cluster of dwellings or hamlet, in a remote location.
10. Notwithstanding this, the appellant indicates that there is a Marks and Spencer Food store at Alford Crossways, some 2.75km from the appeal site, which is part of a BP petrol filling station. Thus, a round trip would be over 5km from the appeal site, a not inconsiderable distance. Even for those who are more able, it seems unlikely that undertaking such a trip on foot would be overly attractive or particularly practical, especially after dark or in poor weather given the limited provision of footpaths for much of the route and absence of street lighting.
11. Whilst this distance would be cyclable, the nature and size of the shop means that it would only be able to offer a modest range of provisions. Furthermore, I am not convinced that cycling to larger settlements further away to make use of their services and facilities would be appealing or practical, especially if purchased goods needed to be carried.
12. It may be possible to catch a bus from Dunsfold Road but again getting to a bus stop from the appeal site would not be overly attractive. Furthermore, I have no information as to the frequency of any services and whether they would provide access to facilities serving a range of employment, education, health and leisure needs.
13. The Framework recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas and it would be unrealistic to expect occupiers of rural sites to rely completely on walking, cycling or public transport journeys to access normal day-to-day services and facilities. Nevertheless, the appeal site is not in a location where it would be easy to make many regular journeys on foot, by bike or by using public transport. The practical reality is that future occupants would need to own a car and they would be highly likely to rely on it as the most convenient means of carrying out their day-to-day activities. All of the above is a further indicator as to the remoteness of the appeal site.

14. Even where housing in rural areas is supported by the Framework, it should, amongst other things, be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of a rural community. There is little substantive evidence to suggest one additional dwelling at the appeal site would assist Alford Crossways or other nearby settlements in this regard. Any contribution that did occur would have a very small positive effect.
15. Therefore, in my judgement, the appeal proposal would be remote from any settlement and being adjacent to Sedgehurst does not prevent it from being an isolated home in the countryside. As such, it is contrary to Paragraph 84 of the Framework. The inappropriateness of the location weighs significantly against the scheme.

Character and Appearance

16. The area is within the countryside beyond the Green Belt and also within an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), a local designation designed to buffer nationally designated landscape and to help retain the land for its own sake. As such, Policies RE1 and RE3 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 1 2018 (LPP1) seek to minimise development and harm and thereby protect the intrinsic beauty and landscape of such areas.
17. The appeal site is within the grounds of Sedgehurst, an existing detached dwelling. The wider countryside in which this property sits is the predominant component of the area's character. In comparison, buildings in the area are sparsely located, appearing intermittently and thus are less significant components, thereby reinforcing the rural and verdant qualities of the area.
18. The appeal site itself includes an existing greenhouse, stable block and wooden storage buildings. It also comprises part of the field to the rear of the stables. These buildings are all single storey and would be removed as part of the proposal as would an existing sand school that is located to the rear of the stables, in an adjacent field.
19. The proposed development would introduce a part one/part two storey dwelling in a similar position to that of the stables and storage buildings. The building would have a design and external materials that would be akin to a more traditional agricultural barn but the large areas of glazing, hardstanding/car parking around the building and delineated curtilage would clearly mark it out as a dwelling rather than an agricultural building. The height and mass of the building would be in marked contrast to the existing, more unassuming, buildings on the appeal site. Whilst I did not see any equestrian equipment, jumps etc during my visit, I acknowledge that the stables and sand school could give rise to such paraphernalia.
20. There are mature boundaries or woodland around the wider Sedgehurst site and so wider views of the appeal site would therefore be limited. Some glimpsed views of the proposal may be possible from the Bridleway to the north of the site, particularly the more prominent two storey element. Even if a new dwelling could only be glimpsed from the Bridleway or other public vantage points in the surrounding area, this would be inherently harmful to the rural and isolated character of the area.
21. The existing appeal site is clearly not devoid of buildings or activity, and these are associated with the existing dwellinghouse, Sedgehurst. Nevertheless, the

- proposal would introduce built form, activities, light spillage etc. that would be associated with residential development. This would intensify its domesticated appearance, permanently altering the overall character of the appeal site. Furthermore, despite its design, an additional dwelling would inherently diminish the more open and rural character that currently exists.
22. It was suggested that the proposal could be adequately mitigated through the provision of new planting around the development. In my view, such a solution would be entirely contrived and would be a form of mitigation of harm rather than an enhancement of the landscape. In any event the purpose of landscaping is to integrate a development into its surroundings, not to hide something which is otherwise unacceptable.
23. Whilst there would be some benefits arising from the proposal, such as the removal of the sand school, these would not outweigh the harm caused by the creation of a new residential building with its own, separate curtilage.
24. Overall, the proposal would represent an erosion of the prevailing character and appearance of the site. Even in the absence of longer-range views, there would still be harm that would undermine the area's qualities. Whilst this effect would be localised, the result could not be said to either conserve or enhance the landscape and intrinsic beauty of the area. The character and appearance of the area would be harmed.
25. The harm I have identified is contrary to Policies RE1 and RE3 of the LPP1 which, amongst other things, seek to safeguard the character and beauty of the countryside generally and protect the AGLV in particular.
26. In this respect the proposal would also be contrary to the Framework, which amongst other things, seeks to ensure developments are sympathetic to local character, including landscape setting.

Other Matters

27. The appellant notes that there are no objections to a range of issues such as the effect on neighbours, the effect on the rights of way etc. Similarly, it is pointed out that no concerns were raised in relation to various matters such as highways/access, design, the impact on trees etc. However, lack of objection or concern on certain issues is not indicative of an overall lack of harm and does not necessarily mean that the current scheme is acceptable. Furthermore, compliance on these matters does not absolve me from making an assessment as to the effects of the proposal in regard to the main issues of the case.
28. It is suggested that the proposal would not have highway safety implications and so would comply with Paragraph 115 of the Framework. However, the issue of the site's location requires the consideration of various matters, including other Framework paragraphs. Therefore, any compliance with Paragraph 115 does not mean the site's location is acceptable.

Planning Balance

29. There is no dispute between the main parties that the Council cannot demonstrate the requisite supply of housing land and it appears that the situation has worsened since the application was refused by the Council. Accordingly, paragraph 11 d) of the Framework is engaged.

30. The provision of a new dwelling would make a minor numerical contribution to the supply of housing although any additional provision would be valuable in meeting the Government's objectives in an area which is not meeting its targets. There may also be some associated social and economic benefits arising from the proposal in both the short and longer terms, but the scale of the development means that these would not be large.
31. The Framework acknowledges that previously developed land can sometimes provide the basis for redevelopment particularly where it helps support the rural economy. However, this is subject to the land being within, or physically well-related to an existing settlement. As the appeal site lies some distance from any recognised settlement, and as I have not found the existing buildings to be as harmful to the character of the wider area as the proposal, any benefit of the scheme reusing PDL carries limited weight in my decision.
32. Overall, the benefits of a single new home would inevitably be modest.
33. Conversely, the support in the Framework for new housing is not at the expense of ensuring that all development is appropriately located. The Framework indicates that new houses should not be built in isolated locations and instead should be focused on locations which are, or can be made, sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.
34. The Framework also seeks to ensure developments are sympathetic to local character. The development of a new dwelling in an isolated rural location would not maintain the existing character, despite the land being within the wider Sedgehurst site. This would undermine the Framework's wider objectives of conserving the rural environment.
35. Overall, I have found that the proposal would result in an isolated home in the countryside and would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. These harms significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the scheme, when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole.

Conclusion

36. When the development plan and the policies in the Framework are each taken as a whole, there is conflict with the proposal. There are no other material considerations that indicate a decision should be taken other than in accordance with them. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Stewart Glassar

INSPECTOR