



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 March 2024

by C Rose BA (Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 05 April 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/23/3328855

Witch Lane Farm, Deans Lane, Charter Alley RG26 5SE

- 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 Mears against the decision of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 21/01681/FUL.
 - The development proposed is erection of 1 no new dwelling and associated parking and garage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the description of development as set out above from the application form as neither party has provided written confirmation that a revised description has been agreed.
3. During the course of the appeal an updated version of The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published. In light of this, the Council provided comments on the implications for the appeal with regard to the supply of deliverable housing sites and the appellant provided comments in response. I will return to this below and have taken the responses into account.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, and,
 - whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for housing, with particular regard to the local development strategy.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal site sits between two dwellings and adjoins an access serving the business units at Witch Lane Farm that are located to the north-east of the site. The access is also a public right of way. The appeal site has the appearance of an agricultural field with open fields on the opposite side of Deans Lane and on approach to the site. It is grassed and partly enclosed with trees and hedging.

6. The appeal site is not visible in long distance views but can be viewed from its frontage with Deans Lane and from the public right of way. Although there are glimpsed views through the trees to the rear of the site to the Witch Lane Farm commercial units, these views are very limited with the site retaining a rural countryside appearance and character due to its open grassed and undeveloped nature with planting to its boundaries. These characteristics set the site apart from the adjacent residential development visually relating the site more closely with the surrounding fields and countryside that form the character of the wider setting. The unspoilt nature of the site therefore contributes positively to the rural appearance of the area and provides a soft visual break to the existing built development.
7. The site lies within the landscape character area of North Sherborne which is noted for its mixed farmland and woodland with low-lying and gently undulating landform. The site mimics and contributes to this pattern of rural land uses and character.
8. The buildings would be constructed within a field that is currently open and devoid of significant built form. The construction of the dwelling, which would be of a considerable size given the combination of its depth, width and associated outbuilding would be prominent in views from Deans Lane and the public right of way. Associated domestic paraphernalia within the site would add to its prominence. As such, the proposal would undermine the sites' role in aiding the wider rural appearance of the area and would harmfully erode the landscape character. As a result, the proposal would be at odds with and harm the rural character of the site and wider area.
9. While the proposal would screen glimpsed views of the business units from Deans Lane, it would replace such views with a more prominent dwelling and garage located closer to Deans Lane. Additional planting would not screen the development entirely and would not compensate for the loss of openness or change in character arising from an urban form of development within the site.
10. In conclusion, I find that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. As such the proposed development is contrary to Policies EM1 and EM10 of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2011-2029) (May 2016) (LP). Amongst other things, these seek to ensure that proposals are sympathetic to the character and visual quality of the area concerned, are of a high quality and positively contribute to local distinctiveness, the sense of place and the existing street scene. As a result, the proposal would also be contrary to the Framework that seeks to achieve well-designed and beautiful places.

Whether appropriate location for housing

11. Policy SS1 of the LP directs new housing to locations within defined Settlement Policy Boundaries (SPB), sites that have been allocated within the development plan, delivery of new homes through Neighbourhood Planning and as exception sites. The site lies outside of any SPB, is not allocated within the development plan, is not an exception site and is within the countryside for planning policy purposes. Policy SS6 of the LP sets out the circumstances where new housing would be permitted in the countryside.
12. The site is not previously developed land, a rural exception site for affordable housing, there are no buildings on the site being re-used or replaced and the

- proposal is not related to agriculture. The only criterion to Policy SS6 that could be relevant to the proposal are e) and g). These relate to small scale residential proposals of a scale and type that meet a locally agreed need and development allocated in a Neighbourhood Plan.
13. Criterion e) to Policy SS6, supports small scale residential proposals of a scale and type that meet a locally agreed need. This is provided that it is well related to a settlement and would not result in an isolated form of development, will respect the qualities of the local landscape and be sympathetic to its character and visual quality, and will respect and relate to the character, form and appearance of surrounding development and amenities of neighbours.
 14. Although the proposal is small scale and the appellant points to a Borough-wide need for housing, I have not been presented with detailed evidence demonstrating that there is a particular housing need in the area for a large 4-bed detached house with a large detached garage. Although I will deal with the housing land supply position later, in the absence of detailed evidence of the need for the scale and type of dwelling proposed, the proposal would not be of a scale and type that meets a locally agreed need.
 15. Even if I were to find that the proposal met a locally agreed need, and although the site is close to dwellings and commercial units, they form sporadic unrelated buildings that do not form or appear as a settlement or related group of buildings. The site is a considerable distance from, and not well related physically or visually to, the closest settlements and as such would also be an isolated form of development. Moreover, I have found above that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. As a result, the proposal does not gain support under criterion e) to Policy SS6 of the LP.
 16. Turning to criterion g) to Policy SS6, although the site falls within the neighbourhood plan area for Wootton St Lawrence Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2029 (December 2019) (NP), it is not allocated for development and as a result does not meet this criterion. Moreover, Policy WSL5 of the NP states that new market housing that is unrelated to the needs of rural business and is outside of the Manydown site allocation will only be permitted where in accordance with Policy SS6 of the LP or infills a restricted gap within the listed settlements. The site does not fall within the listed settlements and is not for an essential need of a rural business. Furthermore, Policy WSL5 states that market housing must demonstrate how the types of dwellings provided will help meet the housing needs of the Parish, particularly through the provision of dwellings designed for smaller households. I have found above that this has not been demonstrated and the provision of a four-bedroom dwelling with a large, detached garage is not designed for smaller households.
 17. Paragraph 84 of the Framework states that development of isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided unless one of five circumstances apply. While I have found above that the site is isolated, the proposal is not related to an essential need for a rural worker, does not comprise a heritage asset, does not propose to re-use redundant or disused buildings, does not involve subdivision and the design is not of, or being put forward as, being of exceptional quality in paragraph 84 terms.
 18. In addition to the above, the site is a considerable distance from a range of services and facilities accessed via unlit country lanes which would be unattractive for walking and cycling. Despite paragraph 109 of the Framework

stating that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, occupiers would be reliant upon the use of the car with poor access to services and facilities. This further weighs against the proposal.

19. In light of the above, I conclude that the appeal site is not an appropriate location for housing, with particular regard to the local development strategy. As such, the proposal would conflict with Policies SS1 and SS6 of the LP and Policy WSL5 of the NP. The proposal is also contrary to paragraph 84 of the Framework.

Other Considerations and Planning Balance

20. The appellant has drawn my attention to a new dwelling granted planning permission at Coombehouse Farm¹. While I note that the Council did not consider that location to be isolated, the appeal proposal is in a different location, and I am required to consider the appeal on its merits. Moreover, from the information before me that proposal is not directly comparable to the current appeal as it does not fall within the Wootton St Lawrence Parish Neighbourhood Plan area and as a result is subject to different development plan policies.
21. The appellant has also drawn my attention to a further planning permission under reference 23/01095/FUL close to the appeal site and Coombehouse Farm. However, it is again in a different location, and I have very limited information in relation to this proposal. As a result, I cannot be sure it is directly relevant to the current appeal. Moreover, I am required to consider the current appeal on its merits.
22. The lack of harm to highway safety, provision of adequate parking, and compliance with the Council's policies regarding energy efficiency, biodiversity net gain and building standards are neutral in my consideration as they are requirements of local and national planning policies.
23. There would be benefits to the supply of housing, benefits from a relatively quick build-out, and benefits to the local economy from the build and occupation of the property. However, given the scale of the scheme these benefits would be small.
24. The development would harm the character and appearance of the area and be contrary to the local development strategy. The relevant policies are largely consistent with the Framework where it states that planning decisions should guide development towards sustainable solutions whilst reflecting the character of an area and safeguarding the environment. Therefore, the proposed development would be contrary to the development plan as a whole and I give significant weight to the conflict with these policies.
25. The Council have advised that following the publication of the revised Framework, it can now demonstrate a four-year supply of deliverable housing sites. The appellant disputes this, references an appeal decision² in support and states that the Council can only demonstrate 3.67 years supply with Policies SS1 and SS6 of the LP considered to be out of date with Policy SD1 coming into play. Policy SD1 of the LP is very similar to Paragraph 11 d) ii. of the

¹ Ref: 20/01546/FUL

² APP/H1705/W/23/3326191

Framework. The appellant further states that the benefits provided through the provision of a single dwelling that could be built out quickly and associated benefits to the local economy through growth, construction works and future occupiers using local services and facilities would outweigh any identified harm.

26. However, even if I were to conclude that there is a shortfall on the scale suggested by the appellant with Policies SS1 and SS6 of the LP out of date and that Policy SD1 and the provisions of footnote 7, paragraph 11 d) ii. of the Framework should be applied, the adverse impacts of granting permission to the character and appearance of the area and the local development strategy would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits outlined above when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

Conclusion

27. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which outweigh this finding. Therefore, for the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Rose

INSPECTOR