



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 April 2024

by **O Marigold BSc DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18th April 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/23/3335932

Land at Easton Royal, Burbage Road, Easton Royal, Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 5LS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mrs Clare Grumbar against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/2023/03421.
 - The development proposed is erection of three detached dwellings, car parking and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation, within which the site sits, is now re-named as a National Landscape. I have therefore used this term where relevant in my decision. However, the legal and planning policy status of the designation is unchanged and so I am satisfied that no party would be prejudiced because of this change.

Background and Main Issues

3. The application is in outline, with access falling to be considered now. Appearance, scale, layout and landscaping are matters reserved for future application. A plan showing a possible layout of the proposal has been provided, which I have treated as being illustrative. I have determined the appeal on this basis.
4. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including on the National Landscape and the Easton Royal Conservation Area (CA), and
 - whether the proposal would accord with the spatial strategy of the Development Plan for the distribution of housing.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that I pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA. The CA encompasses much

of the village of Easton Royal including its main road and Burbage Road. The village generally has a linear grain, where buildings, many of them historic, form single-depth ribbons fronting onto their respective roads. The village is surrounded by fields with a backdrop of the steeply rising escarpment of Salisbury Plain. Relevant to this appeal, the significance of the CA is the attractive, pastoral character of its buildings, spaces and street scenes.

6. The appeal site has dwellings and their gardens on three of its sides. These include The Hermitage, Fairview and Green Acre which form a short row off the main road along a private drive. However, these are something of an unusual intrusion into the countryside, built on former allotments, with few other dwellings in the village having a similar layout. The appeal site is divided from the adjacent field by trees and hedgerows. Even so, it is undeveloped and its soft, green form has affinity with the larger fields beyond. As such, it makes a positive contribution to the CA, including as a transition to the wider landscape.
7. The proposal seeks to erect three dwellings, utilising an existing access from Burbage Road. The dwellings are indicatively shown to be positioned parallel to and behind the existing properties fronting the main village road. The precise form of the proposal is reserved for future application. However, it would inevitably result in significant permanent built form on the site, together with associated hard surfacing and residential paraphernalia. As a result, the proposal would domesticate and urbanise the site. This would diminish and conflict with its pastoral character and would undermine its transitional role.
8. The proposal would also result in residential development in depth. It would form the start of an incongruous second ribbon of buildings, in a broadly backland location. Moreover, the proposed dwellings would not face a highway, and their indicative orientation would be to face away from the village and its main road. In these respects, the proposal would conflict with the grain and pattern of the village. It would thus appear out of place, harming the significance of the CA.
9. The Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) finds that in expansive views the proposal would only have a minor impact on the landscape. However, public views would be clearly obtainable from closer locations, such as the nearby footpaths (LVIA viewpoints 1 and 2). Landscaping cannot be relied upon for screening, particularly in winter months when foliage is reduced. Nor can its long-term survival be guaranteed. Furthermore, even with landscaping and the use of muted, regressive materials, the harmful effects of the proposal would be readily apparent such as through the entrance driveway.
10. For these reasons, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area, including the CA as a whole and the natural beauty of the National Landscape hereabouts. As such, it would conflict with Core Policies 51, 57 and 58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS), adopted January 2015. These seek to preserve and enhance local distinctiveness and the historic environment.
11. I give great weight to the conflict with the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) for the conservation of both the National Landscape and the designated heritage asset. As the harm to the CA would be less than substantial, I will weigh this against the public benefits of the proposal below.

Spatial Strategy

12. WCS Core Policies 1, 2 and 18 set out the spatial strategy for Wiltshire and the Pewsey Community Area. Easton Royal has some facilities such as a school, church and village hall. However, it is categorised in the WCS as a Small Village because of its low level of services and facilities and limited employment opportunities. As such, the village is outside of defined settlement boundaries, and new development is limited to infill within the existing built-up area, and where Core Policy 2 criteria (i) to (iii) are met.
13. 'Infill' is defined at WCS paragraph 4.29 as the filling of a small gap within the village, large enough for not more than a few dwellings, and generally only one. However, the appeal site is a parcel of land of appreciable size. It is big enough to comfortably accommodate the indicative proposal, of three large properties within generous plots. These factors demonstrate to me that the site is not a small gap and so the proposal does not constitute infill.
14. In any case, for the reasons already given, the proposal would fail to respect the existing character and form of the settlement and would impose development in a sensitive landscape area. Therefore, it would conflict with criteria (i) and (ii) of Core Policy 2. There is no dispute that the proposal does not constitute one of the other circumstances where development outside of the defined settlement boundaries is permitted, such as rural exception sites.
15. Consequently, for the reasons given above, the proposal would not comply with the spatial strategy of the Development Plan for the distribution of housing, thereby conflicting with WCS Core Policy 2 and, it follows, WCS Core Policy 1 and 18. Accordingly, I give this substantial negative weight in the planning balance.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

16. In accordance with the Framework, the less-than-substantial harm to the designated heritage asset must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. It would positively contribute to housing supply, including for family-sized dwellings. However, being for only three dwellings, this contribution would be fairly small. I therefore give these benefits only limited weight.
17. Future occupiers of the proposal and its construction would make a positive social and economic contribution to the area, such as to the village school, local services and the construction industry. The proposal would make more efficient use of land, on a site that could be delivered quickly. However, these benefits would be limited because of the modest size of the proposal. For these reasons, I conclude that the public benefits are not sufficient to outweigh the less-than-substantial harm to the CA. Nor do these benefits outweigh the overall harm resulting from the proposal that I have identified above.
18. The parties dispute whether the Council can demonstrate a sufficient supply of deliverable housing land. However, the policies in the Framework that protect assets and areas of particular importance, including designated heritage assets and the National Landscape, provide clear reasons for refusing the proposal in this instance. Accordingly, Framework Paragraph 11(d) is not engaged.
19. The Council's fourth reason for refusal refers to the effect of the proposal on the River Avon Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Had I found in favour of the proposal, as competent authority I would have carried out an Appropriate

Assessment in respect of the effects of the proposal on the SAC. However, as I have found against it for other substantive reasons, this matter need not be considered any further.

20. For the reasons given, I have found conflict with the Development Plan, read as a whole. The material considerations in this case, including the Framework, do not indicate a decision other than in accordance with the Development Plan. This leads me to conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

O Marigold

INSPECTOR