



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 September 2024

by R Kent BA (Hons) MTP DipM MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1st November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/24/3347741

5 Primrose Hill, Witchampton, Dorset, BH21 5BA

- 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 Crichel Properties Limited against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref is P/FUL/2024/00805.
 - The development proposed is Demolition of existing four dwellings and replacement with four dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. On 22 November 2023, all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales became "National Landscapes". The appeal site therefore now falls within the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. However, the legal designation and policy status of AONBs is unchanged, so I have used both terms where relevant.
3. After the appeal was lodged the Council submitted an "Annual position statement – 5 year housing land supply" (APS) dated October 2024 following a report by the Planning Inspectorate on a draft APS submitted to it by the Council. The updated APS confirms that the Council can demonstrate a housing land supply of 5.02 years. The Appellant has had the opportunity to make further comment and I have determined the appeal on the basis of this updated position.

Main Issues

4. The main issues in this case are:
 - The effect of the proposals on the character and appearance of its surroundings, having regard to the location of the site within the Cranborne Chase National Landscape; and
 - the effect of the development on the significance of 1-4 Primrose Hill as non-designated heritage assets with particular reference to the design of the proposed dwellings.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal site comprises 2 pairs of semi-detached, slate roofed timber bungalows with rear gardens backing onto woodland. It is accessed by a narrow country road lined by hedgerows with fields and open countryside beyond. Immediately to the north east of the site are two pairs of attractive, semi-detached two storey houses, 1 to 4 Primrose Hill, which also front the road.
6. The statutory Management Plan for the AONB, the 'Cranborne Chase Partnership Plan 2019-2024' (the Management Plan) describes the wider landscape as a deeply rural area with widely scattered hamlets, villages and narrow roads. It states that the mainly agricultural landscape is sparsely populated, tranquil, and has no large settlements within its boundaries. On the basis of my site visit I concur with this description.
7. The proposed dwellings would be substantially taller and extend further across the site than the existing bungalows significantly narrowing the gaps between the buildings and the plot boundaries. As a result, whilst the footprint of the proposed dwellings is less than the existing bungalows, visually there would be an increase in the scale of development across the site frontage. The views of the trees which can currently be seen from the road through the gaps between the bungalows and over their roofs would be substantially reduced and the site would have a distinctly more developed appearance. This would harm the rural character of the site and its surroundings, especially when viewed from the road.
8. Even though set back from the current building line, the increased height of the buildings and their impact on the countryside would still be clearly apparent from the south western and eastern direction along the road. In particular, as the site is situated on a bend in the road, the increase in the bulk of the buildings on plots 7 and 8 and the consequent harm to the character and appearance of the countryside would be especially noticeable. Whilst the stepped roof heights would to some extent reduce the visual impact of the houses, this would not overcome the harm caused.
9. The existing bungalows and adjacent houses have small front gardens with car parking space tucked to the side and rear. As a consequence, parked cars are not currently prominent in the view of the site from the road. In contrast, the location of the proposed parking and manoeuvring spaces to the front of the site would make the vehicles more obtrusive and further erode the rural character of the site and its surroundings.
10. Regarding the effect on the National Landscape, Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan 2014 (CEDLP) Policy HE3 and the national Planning Practice Guidance require that account is taken of the relevant Management Plan. Replacement dwellings are identified in the Management Plan as a development pressure, with the cumulative effect of larger replacement dwellings changing the character of the locality. Management Plan Policies PT24 and PT25 give guidance on the approach to replacement dwellings in the National Landscape. Amongst other things, they only support replacement dwellings which are not materially larger than the one it replaces, and do not materially impact on the special qualities of the AONB, especially through its height and bulk or the need

for ancillary development such as parking. Whilst the guidance in AONB Position Statement 10 indicates that replacement dwellings should not exceed 140% of the floor space of the original, the effect of the increase in height and bulk of the development on the site, coupled with the proposed parking arrangements, would not enhance the landscape character of the National Landscape.

11. As a consequence, for the reasons given, the development would harm the character and appearance of its surroundings and fail to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. This would conflict with CEDLP Policies HE2 and HE3 which seek to protect and enhance the landscape character and recognised local distinctiveness; and the policies of the Framework to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

Non designated heritage assets (NDHAs)

12. The Council is yet to publish a list of local heritage assets but it is common ground between the main parties that Nos 1 to 4 are NDHAs. Their significance as NDHAs derives from their historic links to the Moor Crichel Estate together with the architectural interest created by the use of Flemish bond brickwork, stone window lintels and sills and tall chimney stacks.
13. The appearance of Nos 3 and 4 closest to the appeal site differs from Nos 1 and 2 with their distinctive, patterned brickwork contrasting with the rendered finish on Nos 1 and 2. From my site visit, I also noted that both Nos 3 and 4 have been extended in the past. Although the houses may have had a functional relationship with the Moor Crichel Estate, they appear as physically and visually separate from the estate parkland to the north. The historical association with the estate is not clearly apparent on the ground. Overall, they therefore have moderate significance as NDHAs.
14. The appeal site lies adjacent to Nos 3 and 4 and forms part of the surroundings from where they are experienced. From the evidence, whilst not themselves NDHAs, the existing timber bungalows form a mixed group of 8 former estate workers cottages with Nos 1 to 4. They therefore make a contribution to their significance as NDHAs. As the proposed development would result in the demolition of the bungalows, the historic link to the neighbouring heritage assets would be lost causing a limited amount of harm to their significance.
15. Whilst the design of the proposed dwellings differs from Nos 1 to 4, it does reflect elements of them. Proposed plots 5 and 6 incorporate dormer windows which echo those on the front of the NDHAs and the proposed render finish would also reflect the finish of Nos 1 and 2. The proposed use of slate roof materials would also be consistent with the NDHAs. The chimneys in the proposed houses are much smaller than those in Nos 1 to 4 and therefore, whilst different, would not compete with them visually. Together with the proposed siting behind the existing building, which would allow views of the heritage assets from the road to be retained, the design of the new dwellings would have a neutral effect on the significance of the NDHAs.
16. Nevertheless, for the reasons given, the proposals would not protect and enhance the significance of 1-4 Primrose Hill as non-designated heritage assets in conflict with CEDLP Policy HE1 which seeks to conserve the historic environment and the policies of the Framework regarding proposals affecting heritage assets.

Other Considerations

17. I have been referred to the age of the existing bungalows and that they are not built to modern standards of construction, including their energy efficiency. The Energy Performance Certificates for 7 and 8 Primrose Hill submitted with the Appellant's evidence indicate the low energy efficiency of various parts of the buildings. The Certificates make recommendations to improve their energy performance. It is suggested that retrofitting the properties would not be possible and a reduction in carbon footprint could be achieved through redevelopment of the site. However, I have not seen convincing evidence to demonstrate why retrofitting is not feasible or why redevelopment would result in a reduced carbon footprint in the longer term.
18. Reference has been made to an existing tenancy arrangement in respect of 5 Primrose Hill. This is a matter between the parties and has not had any material bearing on my assessment of the planning issues in this appeal.

Planning balance

19. The harm caused by the proposed development to the character and appearance of its surroundings and the failure to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty in the Cranborne Chase National Landscape attracts great weight.
20. The Framework requires me, when weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect a NDHA, to make a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of any harm and the significance of the heritage asset. As described above, Nos 1 to 4 Primrose Hill have moderate significance as NDHAs. Whilst the design of the proposed dwellings would have a neutral effect on the significance of the NDHAs, the demolition of the existing bungalows would cause a limited amount of harm to their significance. I give this medium weight.
21. Whilst the proposed dwellings might lead to a reduction in the site's carbon footprint in the longer term, I have not seen clear evidence to demonstrate this. As a consequence, on the evidence before me, it attracts moderate weight.
22. As there are no policies in the development plan which positively favour proposals of this kind and it would be contrary to the policies referred to above, there would be conflict with the development plan as a whole.

Conclusion

23. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

R Kent

INSPECTOR