



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 December 2024

by David Prentis BA BPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11th December 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/C1760/W/24/3342160

Harewood Farm, London Road, Andover SP11 6LJ

- 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 Raymond Farming against the decision of Test Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Reference is 23/01784/FULLN.
 - The development proposed is the erection of three commercial buildings suitable for flexible E(g)(iii), B2 and/or B8 uses, together with associated access, parking, drainage and landscaping and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The development plan includes the Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan 2011-2029 (TVLP). The Council is currently bringing forward a new local plan. The appeal site was part of a larger area included within a Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)¹, although it is not a proposed allocation in the emerging plan. The emerging local plan is not at a sufficiently advanced stage to attract weight in this appeal. However, the evidence base for the emerging plan is a material consideration, amongst other matters.
3. The Council's third reason for refusal related to surface water drainage. The appellant submitted further information relating to infiltration rates and groundwater monitoring. Having considered this information, the Local Lead Flood Authority withdrew its objection and the Council subsequently confirmed that the third reason for refusal would not be pursued.

Main issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for the proposal, having regard to the spatial strategy of the development plan;
 - the effect of the proposal on the landscape character and appearance of the area; and
 - the extent to which the proposal would be connected by pedestrian, cycle and public transport links to key destinations.

¹ Site reference 379 – Land at Harewood Farm

Reasons

Whether the appeal site is in an appropriate location

5. London Road (B3400) is a radial route leading approximately eastwards from Andover. Harewood Farm, which lies on the northern side of the road, is an established employment site comprised of a number of modern industrial buildings laid out in a regular pattern on an east/west alignment. The appeal site extends to around 2.9ha, most of which is agricultural land, to the west of the main body of the employment site. There is also an industrial building and yard adjacent to much of the northern site boundary. To the west of the appeal site, there is further agricultural land. To the south, the site wraps around a residential property and has a frontage to London Road.
6. On the south side of London Road there is a ribbon of detached residential properties standing in large plots enclosed with mature trees and vegetation. Although the appeal site is relatively close to Andover, which is one of two Major Centres identified in the TVLP's settlement hierarchy, it is physically detached from the urban area. There have been recent urban extensions in the locality, including Picket Piece to the north of the appeal site and Picket Twenty to the south west. However, neither is visible from the site. Picket Piece is on the other side of a ridge and Picket Twenty is beyond the older properties on the south side of London Road.
7. The appeal site is outside the settlement boundaries defined in the TVLP and, in policy terms, is therefore in the countryside. This policy designation is consistent with the features on the ground that I have described above. TVLP Policy COM2 allows for development in the countryside where it is consistent with specific policies or where it is essential for a proposal to be located in the countryside. In this case the relevant policy is LE17, which allows for redevelopment, extension of buildings or erection of new buildings for employment use on existing employment sites. This is subject to a proviso² that the proposal is contained within the lawful employment site. The appeal site is undeveloped agricultural land which plainly lies outside the existing employment site at Harewood Farm. The proposal is therefore in conflict with Policy LE17 and, consequently, with Policy COM2.
8. The appellant argues that the proposal can be reconciled with Policy LE17, relying on paragraph 6.92 of the TVLP which states that:
"Proposals which involve the extension of the site boundary into the countryside would be considered on their individual merits."
9. However, those words form part of the supporting text which cannot alter the clear meaning of the policy itself. The appellant also draws attention to the general support for economic development, including in rural areas, expressed elsewhere in the TVLP and in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), together with evidence on the need for development of this type. Those matters are relevant to the planning balance and I shall return to them below. However, they do not bear on the question of compliance with Policy LE17.
10. The appellant also draws attention to the planning history of Harewood Farm, which includes a permission granted for *"four flexible B1(c) light industrial, B2*

² Criterion (a) within Policy LE17

*general industrial, and B8 storage and distribution buildings*³. The appellant notes that three of the units were located within an adjacent agricultural field and therefore extended the boundary of the employment site to the east. It can be seen from the officer's report that this proposal was also treated as being in conflict with Policy LE17. The Council considered that there were other material considerations, namely the removal of prominent and extensive poultry buildings, which led it to approve the proposal notwithstanding that conflict. It is not for me to comment on the merits of that decision, which was a matter for the Council. Nevertheless, it is clear that the decision was informed by considerations that do not apply to the current appeal.

11. Turning to the other criteria of Policy LE17, I consider that the proposal would be reasonably well related to the retained buildings at Harewood Farm. Outside storage, which could be visually intrusive, could be controlled by a condition. The proposal would therefore accord with criteria (b) and (c). However, it would not accord with criterion (a) and would therefore conflict with the policy as a whole.
12. On the first issue, I conclude that the proposal would not accord with the spatial strategy of the TVLP because it would extend the existing employment site out into the countryside. The proposal would conflict with TVLP Policies COM2 and LE17.

Effect of the proposal on the landscape character and appearance of the area

13. The application was accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) which noted that the site is located within the Andover Chalk Downland Landscape Character Area (LCA), as identified in the Council's Landscape Character Assessment. Key characteristics of the LCA include that it is an elevated downland landscape with woodland copses located on ridgelines. There is a gently rounded ridgeline to the north and west of the appeal site which, together with the existing buildings at Harewood Farm, limits the opportunities for longer range views of the site.
14. The appeal site is open arable land on the southern flank of the ridge, which is continuous with an extensive area of similar land to the west and north. Along the northern edge of the site is a strip of plantation woodland, comprising a row of conifers and four rows of mixed deciduous trees. This appears to be fairly recent planting which is becoming well established. To my mind the site is characteristic of the LCA of which it forms a part. That said, the landscape character is affected by the proximity of the existing industrial buildings at Harewood Farm. The proposal would transform the character of the site from open downland to long, linear industrial buildings set within extensive areas of hard paving for parking and servicing. The LVA assessed this as a moderate adverse effect on the local landscape of the Andover Chalk Downland LCA. I agree with that assessment. I also agree that the landscape effects would be experienced within a relatively localised area, due to the features described above.
15. New mixed woodland planting is proposed to the west of the buildings and along the London Road frontage. The LVA suggests that the new planting would be a landscape benefit, in that it would create a coherent landscape structure. I do not share that view. Whilst the new planting would, in time,

³ Planning permission 15/01947/FULLN

mitigate visual impacts, it would not mitigate the loss of open downland. The present lack of enclosure to the western site boundary is not harmful, on the contrary it is characteristic of the wider downland landscape. The proposal would result in a permanent loss of this landscape resource.

16. With regard to visual effects, the main viewpoints within the public realm would be from London Road. The proposed buildings would be at a lower level than the building to the north, although they would be higher than those to the east. The long linear forms, utilitarian design and regular layout of the proposed buildings would not be characteristic of the wider rural surroundings although they would be similar in character to the existing industrial buildings at Harewood Farm. Removal of much of the young plantation would open up views towards the existing yard, although such views would then be obstructed by the proposed buildings.
17. Existing planting along London Road provides some screening and the existing development precludes views from locations to the east of the site entrance. Even so, the nature and extent of the proposed buildings would be readily apparent from London Road, albeit that the effect would be fleeting for those travelling along the road in vehicles. The LVA assesses this as a moderate adverse impact. I agree with that assessment. I also agree that the proposed planting, being close to the viewpoint, would be effective in reducing the visual impact over time.
18. I conclude that the proposal would result in harm to the landscape character of the Andover Chalk Downland LCA, contrary to TVLP Policy E2. Moreover, I do not think that the layout, appearance and scale of the proposed buildings would respect and complement the character of this downland site. In my view the proposal would not accord with TVLP Policy E1. Both landscape and visual effects would be relatively localised and the proposals include mitigation, in the form of new planting, which would reduce the visual effects over time to a low level of harm. These are factors that I shall take into account in the planning balance.

Connections with pedestrian, cycle and public transport links to key destinations

19. The Council's fourth reason for refusal related to highway safety, parking and pedestrian/cycle connectivity. The appellant subsequently submitted further information relating to junction modelling and accident data. This resulted in a statement of common ground between the appellant and the Highway Authority, confirming that all matters were agreed other than pedestrian/cycle connectivity. The Council did not pursue any objections relating to highway safety and parking in its response to the appeal.
20. The proposal would be served by the existing access to Harewood Farm. I see no reason to think that it would be harmful to highway safety and, in this respect, it would comply with Policy T1. The appellant has set out how the level of parking has been assessed and I agree that it would meet the Council's adopted standards, consistent with Policy T2. The issue for this appeal is the extent to which the proposal would be connected with existing and proposed pedestrian, cycle and public transport links to key destinations, as required by Policy T1. The Framework states that, in assessing development proposals, it should be ensured that appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be (or have been) taken up, given the type of development and its location.

21. There are bus stops on London Road close to the site access which give access to services to Andover and Basingstoke. In this respect the proposal would accord with Policy T1 and the Framework.
22. There are currently no footways or cycleways to connect the site with the edge of Andover. The Council and the Highway Authority suggest that a footway/cycleway could be created alongside London Road, on land within the appellant's control, to link with a pedestrian/cycle route that will be provided as part of a development of 180 dwellings on the north side of London Road, to the west of the appeal site. The Council and the appellant disagree as to whether the S106 Agreement for that development would require such a link to be provided up to the edge of the appellant's land. However, for present purposes it matters not who is correct on that point. The appellant does not consider that a link through their land is necessary or desirable and there is no such proposal before me.
23. Whilst the appellant contends that cyclists could use London Road, my assessment is that this route would be perceived as unsafe and unattractive to cyclists due to the prevailing traffic conditions, including traffic speeds.
24. The Picket Twenty development lies to the southwest of the appeal site. The appellant suggests that cyclists could use quiet routes through this mainly residential area to reach the appeal site via an existing off road footway/cycleway to The Middleway, which connects to London Road close to the site entrance. Whilst I consider that this would be a viable route for some pedestrians and cyclists, it would be circuitous, and thus unattractive, for those travelling from areas other than Picket Twenty. There are other residential areas on the eastern side of Andover that would be within reasonable walking/cycling distances if there was a safe and reasonably direct route available. Moreover, I saw that neither the off road footway/cycleway, nor The Middleway, are lit. These areas would feel unsafe during the hours of darkness so this would not be an attractive year-round commuting route.
25. The appellant points out that the proposal would be an extension to an existing employment area. Whilst that is so, the planning permission for four new employment buildings at Harewood Farm referred to above was granted subject to a S106 contribution that was designed to provide pedestrian/cycle facilities along London Road. The Highway Authority states that further feasibility work has identified that it is not feasible to implement a footway/cycleway within the extent of highway land. Whilst it is unfortunate that those intentions have not been realised, to my mind this does not provide a justification for not making appropriate provision in relation to the current appeal scheme.
26. Existing staff at Harewood Farm have taken part in a travel survey which, the appellant suggests, demonstrates that a footway/cycleway would be little used. I attach limited weight to this survey. First, the sample size is small. Second, the proposal is for a significant amount of flexible floorspace so the mix of business types that might occupy the new units is not known. Third, the survey reflects the travel patterns of an existing workforce that have built up over time without the benefit of footway/cycleway provision. It does not take account of the opportunities that there may be to influence the travel choices of a new workforce if such provision were made.

27. The proposals include a travel plan. However, it seems unlikely that such a plan would be effective in promoting walking and cycling in circumstances where safe and attractive routes for walking and cycling do not exist.
28. I have considered whether it would be appropriate to impose a condition requiring a footway/cycleway to be provided across land that is outside the appeal site but within the control of the appellant. The Council has suggested the following wording:

"Prior to the commencement of development, details of the provision of a safe and suitable walking /cycling route to and within the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority."

29. In my view a condition in these terms would lack precision, as the appellant would not know where the route to the site would have to come from. Moreover, as the appellant is not proposing such a route, there is limited information before me regarding the practicality and feasibility of creating it. It follows that it cannot be known whether such a condition would be reasonable. In addition, as there is no proposal before me, I cannot know what other planning interests might be affected. In all the circumstances, I do not think that a condition would meet the tests set out in Planning Practice Guidance.
30. On the third main issue, I conclude that the proposal would conflict with Policy T1 as a whole in that it would not be connected to pedestrian and cycle links to the edge of Andover. Whilst I note that the Framework states that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, the appeal site is sufficiently close to Andover that there are such opportunities here. The appeal proposal would not pursue those opportunities, as required by the Framework.

Other matters

31. The appellant stresses the economic benefits of the proposal, commenting that at present there are 11 businesses, employing 75 staff, operating from the site. Expressions of interest have been submitted from some of those firms suggesting that they would like to expand and occupy more space at Harewood Farm. The general support for economic development found in the Framework and in the TVLP is highlighted. In February 2024, the Council published the Test Valley Employment Needs Further Analysis Study as part of the evidence base for the emerging local plan. That study identified a need for 31ha of land for employment land in Northern Test Valley (NTV) (where the appeal site is located) and 40ha in Southern Test Valley (STV). Comparing supply with demand, the study found a slight oversupply in NTV and an undersupply in STV. The Employment Topic Paper suggests that, with existing commitments, there is no requirement to allocate additional sites in NTV beyond a proposed allocation at Thruxton Aerodrome.
32. The appellant submitted an Industrial and Logistics Needs Assessment which highlighted a strong demand nationally for the uses proposed. That study also identified a greater need for employment land in Test Valley as a whole over the emerging plan period. It is not for me to comment on the overall need, or whether any need in STV should be met in part by providing more land in NTV. Those are matters for the emerging local plan. However, the evidence before me does show that the geographical focus of the need which the new local

plan will address is primarily in STV. Nevertheless, mindful of the Framework and the fact that Harewood Farm is an established employment location, I attach significant weight to the economic benefits of the proposal.

Conclusion

33. For the reasons given above, I consider that the proposal would be in conflict with the development plan. It is therefore necessary to establish whether there are other considerations that indicate a decision other than in accordance with the development plan.
34. As discussed above, I attach significant weight to the economic benefits of the proposal. On the other hand, the proposal would conflict with the spatial strategy of the TVLP. I give significant weight to this conflict with a fundamental policy of the development plan. With regard to landscape and visual effects, I take account of the fact that these would be localised and that the visual effects would diminish over time. Accordingly, I attach moderate weight to this factor. The proposal would not provide opportunities for walking/cycling. Given that the proposed employment uses would be in reasonable proximity to Andover, I consider that this is a significant disadvantage of the scheme. I therefore attach significant weight to this factor.
35. My overall assessment is that the material considerations, taken together, are not sufficient to outweigh the conflict with the development plan that I have identified. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

David Prentis

Inspector