



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 January 2025

by Stuart Willis BA Hons MSc PGCE MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30th January 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3345713

Land East of Barkham Manor, Barkham Road, Wokingham RG41 4TH

- 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 Mark Douglas against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 240179.
 - The development proposed is erection of 3no. detached dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Applications for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr Mark Douglas against Wokingham Borough Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. As a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy was provided at the outset of the appeal, parties have had opportunity to comment on it. Due to this, and that it did not fundamentally alter the proposal there would be no prejudice to me taking it into consideration. A planning obligation has also been provided that would secure a financial contribution towards affordable housing and mitigation with regard to the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA). The Council have subsequently withdrawn reasons for refusal relating to flooding, the SPA and affordable housing.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - Whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for the proposed development, with regard to the local development strategy,
 - Whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for the proposed development, with regard to accessibility to services and facilities,
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area including the Barkham Church and Manor Area of Special Character (ASC), Barkham Manor Historic Park and Garden, and Barkham Manor as heritage assets; and
 - The effect of the proposed development on biodiversity.

Reasons

Development Strategy

5. The appeal site is located outside of the development limits set out in Policy CC02 of the Wokingham Borough Development Plan Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (Local Plan).
6. Along with Policies CP11 and CP9 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Core Strategy), they outline locations where development will be acceptable, and that outside development limits proposals will not normally be permitted unless they meet certain criteria. Policy IRS1 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 (NP) seeks to protect the separation of settlements and requires accordance with Policy CP11.
7. Policy AD2 of the NP requires schemes to demonstrate how the types of homes contribute to the identified need in the area. There is a general need for housing and there is no clear evidence that the mix of housing is not appropriate. Nevertheless, the appeal scheme does not meet any of the specified exceptions for proposals outside development limits.
8. Therefore, the appeal site is not an appropriate location for the proposed development, with regard to the local development strategy. Other than Policy AD2 of the NP, it would be contrary to the above policies.

Accessibility

9. There is sporadic street lighting and varied footway widths between the site and the nearest facilities, and no separate cycle lanes or crossing points nearby. The routes are also sloping with limited natural surveillance and vehicles speeds on the road alongside them were quick at times during my visit. These conditions would likely lead to occupiers using cars for many journeys.
10. The limited connectivity would be most challenging for elderly or disabled future occupiers/users or those with children. Therefore, there would be some conflict with Policy CP2 of the Core Strategy.
11. The National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. Although the bus service may not be frequent, the distance is not overly far to public transport connections. Given the scale of the scheme it would not generate significant movements. Employment facilities and schools would be further away. Notwithstanding this, the evidence indicates that some facilities and services would be within or close to the walking distances outlined out in guidance¹. As such, there would be some potential access to services and facilities by modes of transport other than private vehicle. Moreover, while only a snapshot in time, the footways were used at the time of my visit.
12. The appeals at Barkham Manor Farm², related to various schemes which included an event venue which would have attracted a number of visitors to

¹ The National Design Guide, Manual for Streets, The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation and the Wokingham Borough Council Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document

² APP/X0360/C/16/3142135 APP/X0360/C/16/3142138, APP/X0360/W/16/3141924, APP/X0360/W/16/3141922

the site and had different transport patterns to the scheme before me. Therefore, it is not directly comparable.

13. Consequently, despite some conflict with Policy CP2 of the Core Strategy, the appeal site is an appropriate location for the proposed development with regard to accessibility to services and facilities. It would accord with Policies CP6 and CP9 of the Core Strategy as well as Policy CC03 of the Local Plan. These, in part, aim to locate development to where there is a choice of modes of transport and reflects and promotes accessibility.
14. Policies AD1 and IRS2 of the NP as well as CP1, CP3 and CP17 of the Core Strategy and TB21 of the Local Plan relate to development within development limits, character and appearance and housing delivery. These are not directly relevant to the above main issues. Compliance with Policy CC01 of the Local Plan depends on my conclusion on the development plan as a whole rather than this issue alone.

Character and Appearance

15. The appeal site is a partly overgrown area of land. There are mature trees and other vegetation along the boundaries of the site with a wooded area, subject to a Tree Preservation Order to one side. Barkham Manor is to the other side and there are agricultural fields behind. Outside of the settlement beyond the wood, development is more scattered often with large individual properties set in large plots.
16. The site does not reflect many elements of the national character area which covers a wide and diverse area. However, it forms part of the Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills landscape character area as set out in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment. Relevant features such as wooded hills and pastoral fields, varied topography and bridleways that allow enjoyment of the landscape are found at and near the site.
17. The site currently blends into and contributes positively towards the verdant and undeveloped character of the area outside the settlement. This is partly due to the rising land levels beyond it which is distinctly and clearly separate from the relatively continuous built form of the settlement. As with the previous appeal at the site, the details before me indicate the site is a valued landscape for the purposes of the Framework.
18. Barkham Manor is listed along with its boundary wall. The significance of these are, in part, their traditional appearance and materials along with the gardens and grounds which sit separate to the denser development in the settlement. Their setting includes the walled grounds, but also the land to either side of the more modern access road to it which appear more maintained and enclosed than the agricultural open fields beyond. These nearby areas, which include the appeal site contribute positively to the significance of the listed building by emphasising the grandeur and status of the Manor and its historical link with the wider area.
19. The manor, its grounds and nearby land, form part of the ASC and Barkham Manor's Historic Park and Garden (HPG), which are both non-designated heritage assets. Views over the appeal site towards the Manor and ASC are identified as being for protection and enhancement in the detailed survey of local character of the ASC. The appeal site forms part of, and contributes

positively to, the setting of the ASC and HPG for the same reasons as the listed building.

20. The proposal would introduce several properties, access, parking and other domestic paraphernalia into the undeveloped parcel of land relatively close to the access road and main road which is a green corridor. This would fundamentally change and urbanise the appearance of the site. The layout of the site would still have an overtly residential character rather than a farmstead given the spread of driveways and position of buildings across the site.
21. Elements of the dwellings and their materials would draw on rural buildings and would be different to the previous appeal and each other. However, their large scale, bulky form and domestic outbuildings would fail to reflect properties in nearby clusters, those in the settlement or the manor.
22. Although fewer properties than the previous appeal scheme and of a different design, the footprint and spread of built form and hardstanding would still result in a considerable part of the site being developed. As a result, the scheme would erode the undeveloped area between the wooded space and Barkham Manor. It would be incongruous with the current verdant views and clear separation on the approach to the settlement and transition from the countryside.
23. Planting and the retention of existing landscape features would in part screen the proposal. Conditions relating to landscape details, protection measures during construction and ongoing management as well as for boundary treatments would ensure that features including veteran trees could be retained.
24. Although visual change would be largely localised, the development would still be prominent and discordant in views along the bridleway and from the access and main road including at and between the viewpoints in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal. This would be the case even with the planting that would take some time to mature.
25. Conditions could be imposed to require details of external lighting. Nonetheless, from the evidence before me, with only occasional street lighting and a lack of other properties that it would be viewed with, the scheme would introduce additional lighting into what would currently be a dark area. This would further draw attention to the scheme.
26. Direct views between the site and Barkham Manor/the boundary wall or where they can be viewed together would be limited and there would be planting within this area. Nevertheless, for the reasons above, the appreciation of the setting of the ASC, HPG and listed structures at Barkham Manor along the road and bridleway would be harmed due to the proximity between them and the development. The proposal would harm the settings and significance of the non-designated heritage assets and lead to less than substantial harm to the setting and significance of Barkham Manor and the boundary wall.
27. There would be benefits from the proposal to housing supply and mix in a location with reasonable accessibility to services and facilities. Due to the level of shortfall in housing supply this attracts moderate weight. There would also be economic and social benefits associated with the scheme along with

biodiversity. A planning obligation would secure a contribution towards affordable housing. Given the scale of the scheme these benefits would each be small and together do not outweigh the harm to the heritage assets including the great weight that should be given to a designated heritage asset's conservation.

28. As such, the proposed development would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the area including the ASC, HPG and the listed structures at Barkham Manor as heritage assets. The scheme would fail to accord with heritage and character protection aims of Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, Policies CC01, CC02, CC03, TB24, TB26 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, Policies IRS1, IRS2 and AD3 of the NP. It would also be contrary to the heritage and design aims of the Framework.

Biodiversity

29. There is no clear evidence to lead me to a different finding from the previous Inspector with regard to the mitigation and monitoring of the woodland and protection of veteran trees. Were the appeal to be allowed conditions could be imposed regarding the protection and management of this area, along with details of boundary treatments and permitted development rights to discourage occupiers entering that area.
30. The scheme is not subject to the mandatory 10% net gain set out in The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024. Nevertheless, Policy CP7 of the Core Strategy and TB23 of the Local Plan seek to prevent development unless mitigation or compensation measures are in place and opportunities for new or enhanced biodiversity are considered.
31. The Ecology Technical note outlines several options for net gain and enhancements at the site and the wooded area in the same ownership. The associated visit was carried out at a sub-optimal time of year and the previous Windrush Ecology Limited's Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report was carried out in 2020. However, there is no compelling evidence to indicate that the conditions at the site have significantly altered in terms of biodiversity.
32. While the site appears to have been partly cleared, there is additional land in the appellant's control. This could be used along with the appeal site to ensure sufficient mitigation and enhancement and prevent harm to biodiversity. Therefore, were the appeal to be allowed conditions could be imposed to ensure appropriate information and mitigation are provided.
33. As such, the proposed development would not harm biodiversity. It would comply with Policies CP7 of the Core Strategy and TB23 of the Local Plan as set out above.

Other Matters

34. The Framework seeks to significantly boost the supply of homes and outlines that small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area and be built out quickly. The evidence before me indicates that the Council can only demonstrate a 3.2 year supply of housing land. The benefits associated with housing supply and mix attract moderate weight.

35. There would also be economic and social benefits associated with the scheme along with biodiversity. The appeal site has reasonable access to services and facilities and would support those nearby and in the wider area. A planning obligation would secure a contribution towards affordable housing. Given the scale of the scheme these benefits would each be small. A lack of harm with regards to flooding and the SPA would be neutral factors.
36. Due to the harm with regard to the development strategy and the character and appearance of the area, including a designated heritage asset, the proposal would be contrary to the development plan as a whole. The application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance, in this case a designated heritage asset, provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Consequently, paragraph 11d)ii is not engaged and the scheme is contrary to Policy CC01 of the Local Plan.

Conclusion

37. 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.
38. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

Stuart Willis

INSPECTOR