
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 April 2025

by **C Hall BSc MPhil MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 April 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/U2235/W/24/3352982

Land at Barn Hill, Hunton, Kent ME15 0QT

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Brian Harris against the decision of Maidstone Borough Council.
 - The application Ref. is 24/501390/FULL.
 - The development proposed is for the erection of a single storey dwelling with detached car port, parking and associated landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are a) whether the proposed development would be in a suitable location and with regard to access to services and facilities; and b) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

Suitability of location

3. The appeal site is a triangular-shaped parcel of land to the east of Barn Hill, with topography rising in a broadly northerly direction. The local environs comprise of sporadic dwellings, set in wider open countryside of fields and woodland.
 4. Policy LPRSS1 of the Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan Review 2024 (LPR) supports growth in sustainable locations and seeks to protect the quality and character of the countryside outside of settlements. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that patterns of growth should be managed in support of objectives which include identifying and pursuing opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use; and that significant development should be focussed on locations which are or can be made sustainable through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.
 5. The appeal site is situated in an area designated, in policy terms, as countryside. With regard to access to local services and facilities by sustainable transport modes, the closest settlement is Coxheath, approximately 1.5 miles distant by road. The appellant states that the nearest bus stops are to the south of the appeal site, accessed via Barn Hill and Lughorse Lane. By my estimation, these are some 900 metres away.
 6. To my mind, the site is some distance from the bus stops and the centre of Coxheath where many local services and facilities are situated. Whilst I acknowledge that it would be possible to walk or cycle to Coxheath and the bus stops, the journeys would only appear to be practical via Barn Hill, which has no street lighting or pavement along its length; this would not encourage walking or cycling, particularly at night or during inclement weather.
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7. Therefore I find that the location of the site would hinder travelling to and from local services and facilities, and it is very likely that future occupiers of the proposed dwelling would be highly reliant on the private car. Although there is generally a greater reliance on the private car in rural areas, it remains the case that there would be a lack of sustainable transport choices available for future residents. This would be contrary to the core principles of the Framework set out above.
8. Paragraph 83 of the the Framework indicates that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. However, the contribution one additional dwelling and its occupants would make to the vitality of the rural community would be small. Consequently, whilst the development would make a limited contribution to the local economy and social well-being of the area, these factors would not outweigh my concerns outlined previously.
9. I conclude on this matter that the proposal would not provide a suitable location for new housing. It would be contrary to the relevant provisions of Policy LPRSS1 of the LPR, which amongst other things seeks to focus development in the Borough and protect rural character. It would also be inconsistent with the Framework which identifies that housing in rural areas should promote sustainable transport.

Character and appearance

10. The proposal would introduce residential components into otherwise undeveloped open countryside, within an area of scenic quality forming part of the Greensand Ridge Landscape of Local Value. A new domestic curtilage would be formed on the site, with built form and a hardscaped driveway, manicured gardens and associated elements, such as washing lines, play equipment and barbecues. By their very nature these features would have an adverse, urbanising impact on the land, to the detriment of the verdant setting.
11. I recognise that the new dwelling would have a road frontage and would lie near to other existing properties in the locality, it would be single storey in nature and would not alter the local topography, and conditions could be imposed relating to external materials, the retention of boundary features and new additional landscaping.
12. However, these matters do not counterbalance the in-principle harm that arises to the character and appearance of the area. In my view, to allow this appeal would be to set aside countryside strategy as the primary method of directing development within this part of the Maidstone Borough. This would potentially lead to similar arguments being made for other residential sites outside designated settlements, which would diminish the relevance of the Council's countryside strategy, and be contrary to the overarching principles of sustainable development.
13. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would result in harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It would be contrary to Policies LPRSP9 and LPRSP15 of the LPR which seek to protect the countryside and landscape. It would also be inconsistent with the objectives of of the Framework, insofar as the need to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside is concerned.

Conclusion

14. Based on the foregoing and having regard to all other aspects, the appeal fails.

C Hall

INSPECTOR