



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 April 2025

by Stuart Willis BA Hons MSc PGCE MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 April 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3354144

Ashdown Farm, Maidenhead Road, Hurst RG40 5RR

- 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 Lee Proctor against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 241617.
 - The development proposed is erection of 1 no. dwelling and detached garage. Permission is also sought for the change of use of land from the keeping of horses to mixed use keeping of horses and residential.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the description of development from the application form as no confirmation that a change was agreed has been provided and it is sufficiently precise.
3. During the course of the appeal, the Council confirmed they no longer wished to pursue the reason for refusal relating to drainage.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - Whether the appeal site is an appropriate location for the proposed development with regard to the local development strategy and accessibility to services and facilities.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The site is part of the wider equestrian use on the surrounding land. Even if it were previously developed land, the appeal site itself is currently grass with no buildings on it other than the fencing around it. It is seen with a small stable building adjacent and larger, but of agricultural/equestrian design, building further away. The site is therefore attractive, providing visual links to the wider countryside. It contributes positively to the open undeveloped countryside character and blends into the wider landscape. While not a valued landscape in the current development

plan and not wooded, the site exhibits the rural character of the landscape and open fields features of the Billingbear Valued Landscape.

6. The introduction of a substantial size dwelling and the associated hardstanding, decking and domestic paraphernalia would undoubtedly alter the character of the site. Although within a sizeable plot, the footprint of the building would be far greater than any nearby properties and extent across much of the appeal site. While following a ranch style appearance and materials not untypical, unlike the equestrian buildings, it would be overtly residential and not in keeping with the buildings on the surrounding land. It would diminish the contribution the site makes to the open nature of the area. While being the owner's design vision, the style and scale of the proposal would jar with the more simplistic appearance and form of dwellings in the area.
7. It would be located some distance from and not closely associated with residential plots, that although of varying sizes, are predominantly in linear form positioned close to the road. While there are some buildings and structures set similarly far back from the road, this is development that largely extends from the road back. The proposed property in contrast would be visually divorced from any group or cluster of buildings and would not been seen with these examples. The appeal scheme would be discordant with the existing pattern of development, being positioned considerably further back than most of the development nearby and with largely undeveloped fields between it and the road. Despite the proposed planting that would take time to mature and would only partly screen the dwelling, it would erode the openness of the appeal site and wider area.
8. Private and public views of the scheme would be limited. Nevertheless, this is not a reason to allow development that is inherently unsuitable and it would harm the intrinsic quality of the valued landscape.
9. Given the scale and position of vegetation and the extent of the works to the road frontage, there would be a limited effect on these features. With further details and compensatory planting where necessary, subject to conditions, the scheme would not be harmful in this regard.
10. Notwithstanding this, the proposed development would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area. It would be contrary to Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy¹ as well as Policies CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the Local Plan². These, in part, aim to maintain a high quality environment, ensuring development is of appropriate design and protect features that contribute to the landscape.

Development strategy

11. Whether or not it is a closed list, the proposal would not meet any of the exceptions set out in Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy and as such would not normally be permitted. The scheme would not raise concerns with protecting the separate identity of settlements given the space around it and there are other buildings nearby and some residential ones in the wider area. However, while only for one dwelling, the site is some distance from any settlement. The scheme would

¹ Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2010

² Wokingham Borough Development Plan – Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014

run contrary to the aim of the policy to prevent proliferation of development in areas away from existing development limits.

12. Even if I were to agree that the site was previously developed land, the location of the dwelling is on land currently devoid of built form. While said to be self-build, there is no suitable mechanism before me to secure the dwelling as such and the occupancy would not be tied to the appellant. Policy CP11 does not indicate this would result in compliance or be in itself particularly unusual. The appellant wishes to live at the site, near to their equestrian facilities and has a local connection to the area. However, it has not been shown that the proposal is a case where it does not quite align with all the criteria in the policy but would otherwise be acceptable. In addition, as above, the scheme would not maintain the quality of the environment.
13. The current pattern of use of the site for equestrian purposes would more than offset journeys associated with the new dwelling. However, this is based on the appellant's operation and use of the site. It has not been suggested that the occupancy of the dwelling would be tied to the land. Therefore, the operation and ownership of the dwelling and land could alter. This could result in similar movements associated with the equestrian use as well as those linked to the dwelling.
14. While there are some options nearby for other modes of transport to access facilities, the nearby roads and paths are unlit and without dedicated pedestrian or cycling facilities for the most part. They are also largely without natural surveillance and the nearby public right of way is an unmade surface. There is a verge pedestrians could utilise, but this varies in size and condition. Even if the roads were lightly trafficked, these factors, along with the distances and topography involved mean that future occupiers would be unlikely to walk to services and facilities particularly in times of darkness and inclement weather.
15. Based on distance, cycling would provide links to wider transport options, including bus stops and a range of services and facilities at certain times. Nonetheless, there is no dedicated cycling infrastructure in the area and factors such as lighting, topography and weather would limit its usefulness.
16. Therefore, although the scale of the scheme means there would not be a significant number of journeys from the site, there would be a heavy reliance on private vehicle for most of them.
17. Therefore, the proposed development would not be an appropriate location for the proposal with regard to the local development strategy and accessibility to services and facilities. It would be contrary to Policies CP1, CP2, CP3, CP6, CP11 of the Core Strategy and Policies CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan. These, in part, provide a strategy for development, directing it to certain locations, including in relation to accessibility and character protection.

Other Matters

18. Although generating journeys themselves, the other buildings at the site relate to equestrian use and are not of the same appearance as the appeal scheme. Therefore, considerations of whether they were acceptable would have been materially different to this proposal. Elements of the other appeal decisions put before me are common with this appeal. However, they relate to different types,

locations and scales of development and therefore are not directly comparable. While there is a lack of housing supply, there is no compelling evidence that other locations are not available.

Planning Balance

19. The proposal would contribute to housing supply in an area where there is currently a shortage. There would also be social and economic benefits associated with the construction and occupation of the dwelling as well as to biodiversity and energy efficiency. However, even if the site were previously developed land, given the scale of the scheme these benefits and the weight I give them are small. Even if I were to agree that there was no harm or policy conflict other than that identified above, this would only be a neutral factor. The largely private benefit to the appellant of being near the horses and being able to build a home of their own attracts only small weight as it has not been shown the appeal scheme is the only way of achieving this. While said to be self-build, there is no suitable mechanism before me to secure it as such and I am unable to give this matter weight.
20. The policies the scheme conflicts with are broadly consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework). The development strategy is not currently providing a sufficient supply of housing land. Nevertheless, there would be limited sustainable transport options available for future occupiers and the harm and conflict with these policies attracts moderate weight. The harm to character and appearance and weight to the conflict with the relevant policies is significant. Therefore, the proposal would be contrary to the development plan as a whole.
21. The Council are currently unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing land, said to be 1.7 years. Therefore, paragraph 11d of the Framework is engaged.
22. The proposal would align with the aims of the Framework to significantly boost the supply of housing and that small-scale developments can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement. It also recognises that sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. Furthermore, the parties indicate the site is previously developed land. Despite the extent of the housing shortfall, the scheme relates to a single property so these benefits would be small. Economic and social benefits align with those elements of the Framework as do the benefits from biodiversity and resource efficiency. I also give each of these small weight due to the scale of the scheme. Without a mechanism to secure the property as self-build, the support for such schemes in the Framework does not weigh in favour of the proposal.
23. While options will differ between areas, the scheme fails to accord with the Framework where it states that the planning system should actively manage patterns of growth and that sustainable transport modes are prioritised. As there would be limited options and choice despite the extent of the shortfall in housing supply, I give the conflict with this moderate weight. The scheme is contrary to the Framework where it seeks to ensure developments are sympathetic to local character and that decisions should protect and enhance valued landscapes attracting significant weight.
24. As a result, the adverse impacts of the development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole. As a result, the presumption in favour of sustainable

development does not apply and I have not needed to consider the matter of flood risk.

Conclusion

25. 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.
26. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

Stuart Willis

INSPECTOR