



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 April 2025

by K Stephens BSc (Hons) MTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 April 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/H1840/W/24/3350270

Land at (OS 9795 3584), Station Road, Beckford

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant permission in principle.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Neil Jones against the decision of Wychavon District Council.
 - The application Ref is W/22/02256/PIP.
 - The development proposed is permission in principle for the construction of one self-build detached house.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description above is taken from the Council's decision notice and which the appellant uses on his appeal form. It includes reference to the self-build nature of the dwelling, which was set out in the appellant's Planning Statement submitted with the application.
3. The site address on the application form states 'Oak House, Station Road Beckford'. However, the address above is taken from the Council's decision notice, as the plans do not indicate 'Oak House'. The appellant uses the Council's address on the appeal form, which suggests agreement.
4. During the course of the appeal a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published in December 2024. The document has not raised any new matters which are determinative to this appeal and I am satisfied that neither party would be prejudiced by any reference to the revised Framework.
5. The appeal site is located outside of, but close to, the boundary of the Beckford Conservation Area. Therefore, the statutory duty under Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the LBCA Act) is not applicable, but the relevant policies in the Framework concerning designated heritage assets and their settings are. In granting permission in principle I also have a duty under s66(1) of the LBCA Act to have special regard to preserving listed buildings or their setting. The nearest listed building is The Old House on the corner of Main Street and Station Road, opposite the entrance to the track leading to the appeal site.

Procedural Matters

6. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that permission in principle is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The

permission in principle consent route has 2 stages: the first stage (or permission in principle stage) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle, and the second stage ('technical details consent') is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. Planning permission does not exist unless both the permission in principle and the technical details are approved.

7. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent technical details consent application, if permission in principle is granted. This appeal relates to the first of these 2 stages.
8. In respect of residential development an applicant can apply for permission in principle for a range of dwellings by expressing a minimum and maximum number of net dwellings. In this case, permission in principle is sought for a maximum of one dwelling.

Main Issues

9. In light of the above and with reference to the Council's reasons for refusing the application, the main issues are:
 - whether or not the appeal site would be an appropriate location for housing with particular regard to local and national policy; and
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Whether a suitable location for housing

10. Policy SWDP 2 of the South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016 (the Plan) sets out the Council's development strategy to promote sustainable patterns of development by focusing most development on urban areas such as Worcester, Droitwich, Evesham and Malvern where housing need is greatest and to safeguard and (wherever possible) enhance the open countryside. The policy goes on to state that windfall development, such as the appeal proposal, is to be assessed in accordance with the settlement hierarchy (which is set out in Table 2 of the policy), and that development in the countryside will be limited. The Council's spatial strategy and housing policies are in broad conformity with the aims of the Framework of promoting sustainable patterns of development and identifying opportunities for villages and other settlements to grow.
11. There is no dispute between the parties that the appeal site lies outside the defined development boundary of Beckford, which is a Category 2 village. Hence for policy purposes the site lies within open countryside where development is strictly controlled. The appellant accepts that the proposed self-build dwelling is not one of the listed types of development that would be permitted in the open countryside.
12. Consequently, the proposal would be contrary to Plan Policy SWDP 2. It would also be contrary to Plan Policy SWDP1, which is an overarching policy that reflects the Framework's presumption in favour of sustainable development.
13. There is an extant permission in principle for a self-build dwelling on the adjacent plot. I do not have full details or circumstances of that proposal, although I am led

to understand that at the time the Council could demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing land and there were no negative landscape comments. However, that site is closer to the village than the appeal site and would be adjacent to existing housing and would not extend into the countryside as much. It is therefore not directly comparable. In any event I must determine the appeal before me on its own planning merits and facts.

Character and appearance

14. Plan Policy SWDP25 highlights that the distinctive landscape of south Worcestershire is an important factor and distinctive asset. Plan Policy SWDP21 seeks to ensure, amongst other things, that development integrates effectively with its surroundings and complements the character of the area.
15. During my site visit and walking around the village I saw that Beckford was a fairly compact settlement focused on the church and Beckford Hall. Housing generally fronted the road either side of Main Street and for a shorter extent along Station Road. The village forms part of the Landscape Type 'Principal Village Farmlands' adjacent to 'Village Claylands' to the south, as identified in the County Landscape Character Assessment.
16. For Principal Village Farmlands a primary key characteristic is the 'nucleated pattern of expanded rural settlements' and for the Village Claylands, a secondary key characteristic is a 'nucleated settlement patterns of usually small rural villages. Landscape guidelines for Principal Village Farmlands includes retaining a pattern of strongly nucleated villages with associated low dispersal of settlement in between.
17. The appeal site is an overgrown parcel of land down a track off the bend with Main Street and Station Road. It can also be accessed by a track to the north that passes close to adjacent redundant commercial glasshouses and farm buildings. The last dwelling is some distance away. With the overgrown nature of the site and the adjacent plot together with the surrounding trees, the site does not have a physical or visual relationship with the main part of the village. Instead the proposal would extend built development at a tangent away from the main part of the village that would result in a linear and ribbon extension to the village. This would be at odds with the compact pattern of development and would dilute the nucleated and prevailing pattern of development, such that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area and the Principal Village Farmland landscape type.
18. Accordingly, the proposal would be contrary to Plan Policies SWDP21 and SWDP25, whose aims are outlined above.

Other Matters

19. The Beckford Conservation Area (the BCA) is focused on the older part of the village centred on the church, the Old School, Beckford Hall and remains of a Priory Cell and along the Main Street. There are a variety of building designs and styles. From the limited evidence before me and what I saw on site, I consider the character and appearance and thus special interest and significance of the BCA are, in part, derived principally from the preservation and legibility of the village's historic street pattern and open spaces, and the architectural richness and variety of its historic buildings.

20. Given the location of the appeal site along a linear track leading away from the BCA and not within its invisibility, I am satisfied that the setting of this designated heritage asset would be preserved and its significance would not be harmed.
21. The Grade II listed Old House dates from about the 16th century with later additions and is a two storey dwelling with cellar and attic. Its special interest and significance largely stem from its architectural and historic interest, but also from its well-defined immediate setting as part of a building within a wider rural village setting. Given the location of the proposal, I consider that the setting of The Old House would be preserved and its significance would not be harmed. The Council has raised no concerns with regard to either of the heritage assets.
22. Issues concerning drainage, flood risk and sewerage, highways and access, contaminated land and ecology and biodiversity would be considered at the Technical Details consent stage.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

23. A decision on whether to grant permission in principle must be made in accordance with the relevant policies in the development plan, unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.
24. The proposal would be contrary to the Council's spatial strategy and to allow the erection of a dwelling in the countryside outside a defined development boundary for the village would undermine that strategy and the approach set out in the Framework. I have also found there would be harm to the character and appearance of the area and the Principal Village Farmland landscape type. These are serious planning objections that count against the proposal to which I give significant weight.
25. However, the Council confirms that it cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. Hence policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date and paragraph 11d) of the Framework is engaged.
26. The proposal would help reduce the Council's housing shortfall and would help the Government's aim of significantly boosting the supply of housing and the development of small sites. However, a single dwelling would only have a modest effect. I am led to understand the appeal site has been subject to sand and gravel extraction in the past and hence could be regarded as previously developed land or brownfield land. The Framework encourages the effective use of land and that substantial weight be given to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes. However, as already described the site is not within the settlement nor is it a suitable site for housing, and so I give the site's brownfield status moderate weight in this case.
27. The proposed dwelling would be a self-build dwelling for the appellant's family's own occupation. This would accord with the Framework which identifies "people wishing to commission or build their own homes" as a distinct section of the community that should be reflected in policies. Under legislation¹ the Council has a legal obligation to maintain a three-year rolling programme of self-build custom housing (SBCH) and a register of those wishing to acquire a serviced plot of land

¹ The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (as amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016) and the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Regulations.

for SBCH projects. The appellant is on the Council's SBCH register. At the time the application was submitted the appellant notes the Council had sufficient self-build plots approved to meet the number of people on the Register, but that the figures are a minimum. In its appeal statement the Council confirms it had a shortfall of 1 dwelling for the period ending October 2024. From the evidence before me, the magnitude of the shortfall is not significant, but nonetheless the provision of one SBCH dwelling would be a modest contribution towards meeting the shortfall.

28. The appellant also draws my attention to an appeal decision² some 6 years ago where that Inspector found a lack of specific SBCH policies triggered Framework paragraph 11d). I do not have the full details or circumstances of that case to draw any meaningful comparisons. However, the lack of specific SBCH policies does not automatically render the development plan out-of-date and engage paragraph 11d). A shortfall of SBCH does not mean such dwellings can be allowed anywhere. The proposal is still for housing and the plan has a spatial strategy to guide the location of housing. Moreover, it is not uncommon for development plans to be out of sync at times with new national policy. In any event, paragraph 11d) is already triggered due to the lack of a 5 year supply of deliverable housing land.
29. There would also be some associated short-term economic benefits from jobs and the supply chain during the construction phase and some longer-term spending by future occupiers, at least some of which would be spent in the local area, and support for local services to a modest degree. However, these benefits would be very limited given that only one dwelling is proposed.
30. There is no dispute between the parties that Beckford is a generally sustainable location, although there is no longer a shop in the village so access to day-to-day facilities would be limited, but there is a bus service to Tewkesbury and Evesham. However, to allow new dwellings to be built outside of selected villages in the countryside just because there are some services/facilities/employment nearby or that residents can drive to, even if distances are relatively short, could be a scenario too easily repeated that would give rise to ad-hoc and unsustainable patterns of development that would undermine the Council's spatial strategy and be contrary to the Framework.
31. The appellant states that in the Plan Review there is an identified need for some 18 dwellings in Beckford. That may be so, but that does not mean the Council's spatial strategy for the location of housing is to be abandoned. The new plan will look at ways to accommodate the identified need in a sustainable manner.
32. I saw there was some limited housing development along the lane, and a number of properties that appeared to have been converted from farm or agricultural buildings. There is also a conversion scheme that has been allowed for one of the redundant poultry sheds into five dwellings. I do not know the circumstances or the policy background to their existence, but they are located outside of and beyond the defined development boundary for Beckford. Furthermore, re-use of existing buildings or prior approval applications are generally assessed against different criteria and policies and are therefore not directly comparable, nor do they set a precedent for extending built development from the village towards them.

² APP/H1840/W/19/3241879

33. The generation of additional Council Tax revenue from the dwelling cannot be regarded as a benefit as it is a mechanism to help offset the impacts of new development on an area.
34. I am mindful that the Framework recognises that the planning system should be genuinely plan led. To develop the appeal site for housing would be at odds with, and would undermine public confidence in, the plan-led system.
35. I find the benefits of the proposal, alone and in combination, do not amount to material considerations sufficient to outweigh the conflict with the development plan. Accordingly, the appeal should be dismissed.

K. Stephens
INSPECTOR