



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 May 2025

by R Cahalane BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17TH July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/25/3358317

Land North East of 1 Waterworks Cottages, Wickham Road, Swanmore, Southampton SO32 2QF

- 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 Anthony Taylor against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref is 24/00338/FUL.
 - The development proposed is a pair of semi-detached dwellings with vehicular access and off road car parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the significance of the Soberton Pumping Station Conservation Area as a designated heritage asset; and
 - whether the location of the proposed dwellings would form an appropriate reuse of a previously developed site.

Reasons

Conservation Area

3. The appeal site forms part of a wider site that was formerly under one ownership as a waterworks facility. The wider site includes a terrace of three two-storey dwellings (Nos 1-3 Waterworks Cottages), a large building of Edwardian origin formerly used as a pumping station and now used as an auction house, with a car parking area in front of it and an overflow parking area to the northeast, along with further buildings to the rear still in use by Portsmouth Water.
4. The proposal's frontage faces Wickham Road (A32), between the shared site access and the side of No 1 Waterworks Cottages. It contains areas of grass and hardstanding, mainly enclosed by fencing, with large mature trees beyond along its rear boundary. Along with the wider site as described above, it is within Soberton Pumping Station Conservation Area (SPSCA), a designated heritage asset (DHA). The main parties agree that the former pumping station and its associated Edwardian-style buildings are non-designated heritage assets (NDHA).

5. Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. From what I have seen and read, the significance of the SPSCA is derived from its spacious layout of Edwardian-style red brick buildings, set amongst mature trees and at significant distance from other development, with well-preserved original details including ornate window, brick and roof detailing.
6. I found the proposal site to contribute positively to the significance of the SPSCA, despite its fenced enclosure. Its treed backdrop and lack of buildings means that it contributes to the open and spacious character of the SPSCA.
7. The dwellings would sit slightly lower than Nos 1-3 Waterworks Cottages. Although they would be sited partially forward of the front elevation of No 1, they would be set slightly behind No 1's foremost two-storey front gable end. The dwellings are therefore of appropriate scale when read alongside Nos 1-3 Waterworks Cottages and their traditional appearance would also broadly reflect their design features, subject to appropriate final material specification details.
8. However, the proposed dwellings would significantly restrict the pleasing views of the established line of trees between Waterworks Cottages and the former pumping station. The siting of the former pumping station building relative to the proposal also means that some views of its ornate detailing would be restricted when passing or approaching the wider site, in particular its prominent side gable ends containing distinctive high window arches that signify its former municipal function.
9. Less than substantial harm to the significance of the SPSCA would therefore arise from the proposed dwellings in this location, and some harm to the former pumping station building as a NDHA would also occur. The proposed landscaping scheme, including removal of the existing fencing, would not mitigate this harm.
10. The proposed dwellings would therefore fail to preserve the significance of the SPSCA as a DHA, and this harm must be given considerable importance and weight. The scheme is thus contrary to Policy SD15 of the South Downs Local Plan (2019) (SDLP). This policy requires, amongst other things, development to preserve or enhance the special architectural or historic interest, character or appearance of the conservation area, including in respect of its established landscape setting. Consequently, the proposal would also conflict with the First Purpose of a National Park, as it would not conserve and enhance the cultural heritage of the area.

Location

11. Subsection 1 to Policy SD25 of the SDLP directs development to a list of 53 settlements distributed across the South Downs National Park, as defined in the SDLP Policies Map. Its supporting text advises that outside of settlement boundaries, land is treated as open countryside. In this context, the appeal site lies in the countryside, and it is outside of and detached from a settlement boundary.
12. Exceptionally, Subsection 2 to Policy SD25 supports development outside of settlement boundaries where it: complies with relevant SDLP policies; responds to the context of the relevant broad area or river corridor; and is an appropriate reuse of a previously developed site, excepting residential gardens, and conserves and enhances the special qualities of the National Park.

13. The SDLP provides no explicit definition of a “previously developed site”. A definition for “previously developed land” is however contained in Annex 2 to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). This includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed.
14. The hardstanding within the proposal site was clearly visible during my site visit, and predominantly consists of a row of six marked car parking spaces, mainly enclosed by fencing. It takes up a significant portion of the site area, and there is no evidence before me to suggest that this has not been lawfully developed.
15. Although the site also contains a grassed area, it is fully separated from the adjacent dwelling of No 1 Waterworks Cottages by closeboard fencing along its rear garden side boundary. It therefore does not comprise a residential garden and there is no evidence before me of an historic residential garden use. Based on the submitted evidence and what I saw on site, I have no reason to dispute that the existing site is not developed in form, and in a lawful manner.
16. The SDLP does not provide a specific definition of what constitutes an “appropriate reuse” of a previously developed site. However, when read a whole, it is clear that the SDLP seeks to direct new housing development to within settlement boundaries in a manner that accounts for their facilities and capacity for growth. Its transport policies also facilitate developments that make it easier for people to travel to and around the National Park by sustainable means.
17. Wickham Road (A32), in the vicinity of the site, has no footway and is unlit, with inclining verges adjacent each side of the site access, narrowing to the southwest of this access. There is a significant bend further northeast along the A32 just beyond the auction house parking area, and this highway leads for some distance to Droxford village. Pedestrian refuge points near to the site are limited. This section of highway therefore did not feel particularly attractive or safe to walk along.
18. The Meon Valley Trail runs along the rear of the wider pumping station site, upon a former railway line from Wickham to Droxford. I observed this countryside trail being used by pedestrians and I have no reason to doubt that it is also suitably used by cyclists. However, the section in the vicinity of the proposal is unlit and significantly enclosed by tree canopies along each side, and may become muddy during winter months or periods of inclement weather. It would therefore not be a particularly attractive or feasible route for all users throughout the year.
19. Soberton Heath is to the east beyond the Meon Valley Trail. Based on the submitted evidence and what I saw during my visit, this appears to be the closest settlement to the proposal, with public facilities limited to the Bold Forester public house. Soberton Heath would therefore not facilitate the day-to-day needs of future occupiers of the proposed dwellings.
20. The highway route from the site across the A32 to the more extensive facilities at Swanmore village is mostly unlit, and large sections are narrow with no footways. It is not within everyday walking distance and would likely be perceived as hazardous or prohibitive for less experienced or confident cyclists.
21. It is put to me that direct access from the Meon Valley Trail to the proposed dwellings could be negotiated with Portsmouth Water, who have purportedly granted such access to Nos 1-3 Waterworks Cottages. No legal mechanism is

however before me to secure this. In any event, it would remain that the proposed dwellings would not be within everyday walking distance to essential facilities and services, and that the existing routes, including the Meon Valley Trail, are not suitable pedestrian or cycle routes throughout the year for all users.

22. The proposal would introduce further unsustainable patterns of development within the countryside, particularly given that it is not on a public transport route. The dwellings would thus likely be heavily reliant on use of private cars to meet day-to-day needs. The presence of other detached residences and Sydenham's Timber Centre, beyond Waterworks Cottages and on the same side of the A32, does not justify further unsustainable travel patterns in the countryside.
23. The supporting text to Policy SD25 advises that it provides some limited flexibility, in exceptional circumstances, to allow "brownfield" development outside settlement boundaries, where demonstrably necessary to meet the wider objectives of the SDLP. There is however no demonstrable evidence before me to indicate that the proposed countryside location for the provision of two dwellings is supported in principle by other policies in the SDLP. An essential need for the countryside location has therefore not been demonstrated.
24. Policy SD25 supporting text also advises that wider development needs and pressures will not be accepted as a reason to develop on any site outside of settlement boundaries. Whilst I am conscious that supporting text does not have the force of policy and cannot trump it, it is nonetheless relevant to the interpretation of a policy.
25. For the above reasons, I conclude that the location of the proposed development would not form an appropriate reuse of a previously developed site, contrary to Policy SD25 of the SDLP. The harm I have identified to the significance of the SPSCA as a DHA also amounts to conflict with SDLP Policy SD25, as it requires compliance with other relevant SDLP policies.

Other Matters

26. It is put to me that the proposal would avoid auction house staff having to travel in excess of five miles to work and would create more activity as a deterrent to theft of items. There is however no demonstrable evidence before me that the dwellings would be purchased or occupied by auction house staff, or that the proposal is the only or least harmful solution to improve the security of the auction house premises.
27. The appellant is aggrieved in the manner in which the National Park Authority (NPA) determined the application, including an initial case officer recommendation to approve that did not materialise. I have however assessed the proposal on its own merits based on all submitted evidence and following my site visit. Any inconsistency of approach on the NPA's part is a matter between it and the appellant, and has had no bearing on my determination of this appeal.

Heritage and Planning Balance

28. Policy SD1 of the SDLP states that when considering development proposals that accord with relevant SDLP policies and with National Park purposes, a positive approach will be taken that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This approach reflects that of the Framework. I have however found that the proposal amounts to less than substantial harm to the significance of the

SPSCA, having regard to the Framework's historic environment policies. Less than substantial harm does not equate to a less than substantial planning objection. The proposal would also conflict with the First Purpose of a National Park, as it would not conserve and enhance the cultural heritage of the area.

29. Paragraph 212 of the Framework states that when considering the impact of development on the significance of a DHA, great weight should be given to its conservation. Framework paragraph 213 states that any harm to the significance of a DHA should require clear and convincing justification.
30. Framework Paragraph 215 states that less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The appeal submission includes a letter from a local estate agent indicating that there is demand for two-bedroom dwellings which is not being met in the area. This stems from first time buyers and people downsizing who want to remain in the area, but without large gardens or more than two bedrooms. The proposal also includes ensuite facilities for each bedroom, and the overall floorspace for each dwelling would exceed the national minimum space standards.
31. Whilst not amounting to an essential need for a countryside location in the context of the SDLP, I have no reason to dispute that providing two dwellings as proposed would meet a certain type of local demand, and without having to develop agricultural land. The Framework also supports an increased supply of homes to reflect the needs of different groups in the local community. I afford moderate weight to this benefit.
32. The proposal includes photovoltaic panels installed on the roofs, and intends to provide electric vehicle charge points and air source heat pumps to reduce carbon emissions, along with sustainable drainage and water consumption limit measures. Construction materials sourced from the nearby timber yard would also be used. The above measures to reduce climate change and resource use impacts could have been secured by suitably worded conditions to comply with SDLP Policies SD22 and SD48, had I been minded to allow the appeal. As these matters predominantly comprise planning policy requirements, I give them limited weight.
33. The above benefits in totality would not outweigh the extent of harm upon the SPSCA's significance which would arise from the proposal. In this respect, there is therefore conflict with Policy SD15 of the SDLP.
34. As already set out above, I have also found that the location and nature of the proposal would not form an appropriate reuse of a previously developed site, contrary to Policy SD25 of the SDLP.

Conclusion

35. For the reasons given above, the proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and the material considerations before me, including the Framework, do not indicate that a decision should be made otherwise than in accordance with the development plan. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

R Cahalane

INSPECTOR