



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 July 2025

by Stewart Glassar BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 August 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/25/3359755

Field House, Old Willingdon Road, Friston, East Sussex BN20 0AT

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by J Joyce against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref is SDNP/24/02109/OUT.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of a stables building. Erection of a two storey dwellinghouse as a replacement.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The planning application was submitted in outline with all matters reserved for future consideration. Although references have been made to matters such as the size, height and design of the proposed dwelling and a proposed site layout plan has been submitted, given the nature of the application these details could only sensibly be understood as being for illustrative purposes. Accordingly, I have made my decision on this basis.
3. As part of the planning application process there were queries over land ownership, which I understand may now have been resolved. However, at the time of submission the correct certificates were provided and the planning application validated. It is therefore not a matter which has a bearing on my decision.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on a) the character and appearance of the area; b) the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers; and c) biodiversity.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. The appeal site comprises an existing stable building and areas of hardstanding. It sits within the wider grounds of Field House, a large, detached dwelling. While there has clearly been some sub-division of plots, including The Old Dairy, which is to the southeast of the appeal site, the area is characterised by large, detached dwellings set well back from their site frontages and within extensive, verdant grounds. This loose knit ribbon of houses which extend along Old Willingdon Road are framed by the surrounding countryside. Collectively this all contributes to the spacious and semi-rural character of the area.

6. The proposal seeks to demolish the existing stables and build a new two storey dwellinghouse in its place. Aside from an existing site layout plan, no details of the existing building such as elevations are provided. From my observations on site, the existing stable building is a single storey structure.
7. I note that the appellant alludes to the new dwelling occupying the same footprint as the stables and being no higher than the existing building. Reference is also made to the use of dormer windows to enable the 'roofspace' to be occupied. However, such detailed matters are not part of the outline proposal and could only sensibly be considered as 'illustrative' material. Furthermore, I have serious doubts that a new two-storey dwelling could replicate the same height as the stables and provide upper floor accommodation that was of an appropriate standard and usable.
8. Given that the proposal is in outline for a two-storey dwellinghouse, the appellant would be entitled to expect that the full extent of the scheme could be achieved on the site if permission were granted. They would not be tied to a building similar to the existing stables, even if that outcome could be achieved.
9. Therefore, while layout, scale and appearance are reserved matters it is difficult, in principle, to conceive of any sensible arrangement for a new two-storey dwelling on the site that would not appear larger or taller than the stables. As such, a new dwelling would not maintain the prevailing character/proportions of the existing building.
10. Consequently, a two-storey detached dwelling would be likely to introduce a highly conspicuous structure onto the site. Even if such a dwelling were set back from the site frontage in the way suggested by the appellant, it would nevertheless still be noticeably forward and out of keeping with the pattern and grain of development along Old Willingdon Road.
11. Furthermore, in comparison to most other properties in the vicinity, the proposal would have a relatively small curtilage. As such, in this context, a two-storey dwelling, whatever the detailed scale or appearance, would appear unappealingly cramped on its plot. Consequently, it would fail to maintain the area's prevailing spacious character.
12. All of the above lead me to the conclusion on this main issue that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, the proposal is contrary to Policies SD4, SD5, SD6, SD21 and SD25 of the South Downs Local Plan 2019 (SDLP) which require development to, amongst other things, respect local character and protect the landscape and visual integrity of the area.
13. The proposal is also contrary to Paragraph 135 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which, amongst other things, seeks to ensure developments are sympathetic to local character, including landscape setting.

Living Conditions

14. As above, I must consider the proposal on the basis of the full extent of what has been sought and what could be built out as a result. I note the appellant's stated intention for the new dwelling to have a footprint and position identical to the existing building, with no windows on the upper part of the southeastern elevation.

However, this is only illustrative of one possible outcome, and notwithstanding my own reservations as to the ability of achieving this, it does not rule out other layouts and designs coming forward at the reserved matters stage.

15. Indeed, given the information before me and my own observations on site, it is difficult in principle to conceive of a layout or design which satisfactorily accommodates a two-storey dwelling on what is a modestly sized site, without harming the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers.
16. It seems to me that either a two-storey structure would be positioned close to the garden of The Old Dairy, thereby becoming an overbearing or overshadowing structure; or alternatively habitable room windows would compromise the prevailing levels of privacy enjoyed by this neighbour. Either outcome would result in this neighbour's living conditions falling below that which they could reasonably expect, having regard to their current situation and the area generally.
17. I therefore conclude that the appeal proposal would harm the living conditions of the neighbouring occupiers. As such the proposal would be contrary to Policy SD5 of the SDLP which requires, amongst other things, that developments have regard to avoiding harmful impacts upon surrounding uses and amenities.
18. The proposal would also be contrary to Paragraph 135 of the Framework, which amongst other things, seeks to ensure developments create a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and do not undermine quality of life.

Biodiversity

19. I acknowledge that much of the site comprises hardstanding and building but given its context, some wildlife could be expected in and around the site. The lack of any ecological appraisal or information makes it difficult for example to rule out the building being used by bats or to understand the extent to which the existing habitat may be of any ecological benefit.
20. The appellant indicates a willingness to provide enhancements and undertake surveys at the reserved matters stage. However, without a baseline survey and appraisal at this stage, it is not possible to assess the effect of the development in principle nor possible improvements as a result of the scheme.
21. Additionally, while I cannot rule out the possibility of the site being exempt from having to deliver biodiversity net gains, no landscaping details are presented. I accept the proposal is outline, but this would be *the* planning permission, and it has not been demonstrated biodiversity net gains are not applicable to the development or that if they are applicable that they could be achieved.
22. Therefore, I must apply the precautionary principle and find that the proposal could result in harm to protected species and biodiversity. As such, I am unable to find the proposal compatible with Policy SD9 of the SDLP which, insofar as is relevant to this appeal, requires up-to-date ecological information to be provided prior to determination and for proposals to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
23. The proposal would also be contrary to the requirements in the Framework that seek to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Other Matters

24. The appellant refers to a need for new housing generally but does not suggest an absence of a five-year supply of deliverable housing land for the area. While this does not mean there is no benefit in providing additional housing, the positive weight I ascribe to this aspect of the proposal is commensurate with the scale of the provision provided.
25. The purpose of this appeal is to determine the scheme as submitted. Despite the appellant's request, it is not within my remit to proffer an opinion on possible alternative schemes for the site.

Conclusion

26. In conclusion, the proposal conflicts with the development plan when taken as a whole. There are no material considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, that indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with it. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Stewart Glassar

INSPECTOR