



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 July 2025

by **SE Hughes BA (Hons) PGDip MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/25/3364563

Land to the north of Newtown Road, Ramsbury, Wiltshire SN8 2PP

- 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 Messrs Gorrings, Bennett and Marks against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/2024/11703.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a minimum of 4 dwellings and a maximum of 5 dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal is for permission in principle. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that this is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The permission in principle (PIP) consent route has two stages: the first establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle and the second (technical details consent - TDC) is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these two stages.
3. 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 TDC application if permission in principle is granted.
4. A site layout plan has been submitted as part of the proposal. It is an illustrative plan only which depicts a principal 'farmhouse', with four barn inspired dwellings arranged around a yard. As this is only one way that the scheme could be developed, I have attributed limited weight to this plan in my consideration of the appeal.

Main Issue

5. The main issues are whether or not the site is suitable for residential land use having regard to:
 - the amount of development proposed and its effect on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape; and
 - its location and its accordance with the spatial strategy of the development plan, in particular its accessibility to services and facilities.

Reasons

The North Wessex Downs National Landscape

6. The appeal site is part of an agricultural field located on the south facing valley slope of the River Kennet. Along with Ramsbury, the site lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NWDNL), an area designated for its landscape and scenic beauty.
7. This part of the NWDNL is nationally defined as the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs Landscape National Character Area and more locally as Character Area 7 Kennet Valley in the 'East Wiltshire (Kennet District) Landscape Character Assessment, 1999'. The latter identifies the Kennet Valley as having an essentially tranquil, intimate and pastoral character. Furthermore, it advises that where areas of enclosed farmland with an intact hedgerow structure along the valley sides are visually contained, small-scale essential development which must be located in the countryside could potentially be accommodated, where it does not adversely affect the attractive, rural and unspoilt character of the river corridor.
8. Two properties, 'Ravensfield' and 'Wootton House', are on either side of the field. They are centrally positioned within substantial grounds. Aside from these dwellings, from 'Mallard Cottage' to the west to 'Foundry Cottage' to the east, Newtown Road is loosely developed with dwellings informally dispersed alongside it. This gives the area a distinctly rural, verdant feel, reflecting the tranquil, intimate and pastoral qualities referenced in the local character assessment.
9. To the south, east and west mature hedgerows partially screen the field. However, it remains visible from several public vantage points on Spring Hill on the opposite side of the valley and from Newtown Road, where its verdant character makes a positive contribution to the NWDNL. It is also visible from the private domain of several neighbouring properties.
10. With regards to the appeal site's location in the NWDNL, I have given great weight to the duty imposed by Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of National Landscapes. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing this area as it has the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.
11. Following my site visit and based on the evidence before me, it is inevitable that some vegetation would be lost from the existing southern hedgerow boundary in order to provide a suitable means of access. This would open up views into the site of the development from Newtown Road and change the leafy, rural pastoral character of the road.
12. The indicative proposal shows a cluster of buildings arranged around a yard which would leave intervening green open areas next to the public highway. Whilst it is argued that the buildings would be designed to have a rural farmstead appearance using vernacular materials, due to the number of dwellings proposed it would still result in a small built development within the verdant agricultural field between 'Ravensfield' and 'Wootton House' which would be perceptible from Newtown Road. Given the number of dwellings proposed and the width of the site I do not consider that an alternative layout would remedy this. Nor do I consider that the

provision of additional planting would overcome the inherent loss of the farmland and the important contribution it makes to the NWDNL.

13. With regards to the development's effect on the "green gap" separating Ramsbury and New Town, I have considered the appellant's arguments, including that the position of the development on the lower slope of the field will preserve views of the most visible upper part of the field from the surrounding landscape. Nevertheless, despite existing and proposed planting, the development would still be visible from Newtown Road due to the access opening and would not be completely screened from views in the wider landscape, as evidenced in the appellant's photomontages.
14. For these reasons I find that by virtue of its built form, residential activity and lighting at night, the proposal would harmfully encroach into the countryside both in the short and the long term. As such the proposal would have a significant harmful impact on the area's distinctive rural and dispersed housing pattern and would fail to enhance the existing tranquil and rural character of this sensitive landscape setting.
15. Consequently, the proposed development has failed to demonstrate that it would conserve and enhance the NWDNL. Accordingly, I find conflict with Core Policy (CP) 51 and CP57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) in relation to the location of the proposed development and the conservation and enhancement of the landscape character of the NWDNL. These policies, amongst other things, seek development that protects, conserves and, where possible, enhances the character of the landscape and local distinctiveness.

Spatial Strategy

16. CP1 and CP14 of the WCS outline the hierarchical spatial strategy for accommodating new housing in Wiltshire, with development focused on principal settlements, then market towns, then local service centres, then large villages, which include Ramsbury, then small villages. The premise being that the largest settlements, highest in the hierarchy, offer the best access to employment and services, and by focusing development here, it helps to safeguard them and support their self-containment, thus helping to reduce the need to travel.
17. CP2 of the WCS states that, unless permitted by other policies within the WCS as set out at paragraph 4.25, development will not be permitted outside the limits of development. The appeal site is classified as a location outside the limits of development under Policy CP2 and it has not been suggested that any of the paragraph 4.25 exceptions apply.
18. CP61 of the WCS indicates that new development should be located and designed to reduce the need to travel by private car and encourage the use of sustainable transport alternatives.
19. Ramsbury has a range of services and facilities including shops, public houses, a post office, church, primary school, pre-school, doctors surgery, library, community centre and children's play areas within a 14 minute walk of the appeal site. Also, the evidence indicates that bus services through the village provide services to local towns. Whilst there is no footway immediately next to the appeal site it is only a short distance of approximately 220m to a footway which leads to the village. Given that Newtown Road has a 30mph speed limit and I observed that it was

lightly trafficked, the short want of a footway would not necessarily prevent occupiers of the appeal scheme from accessing services and facilities in the village.

20. In view of the above and recognising that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, I find that the proposal would allow future occupiers access to a reasonable range of village services within walking or cycling distance, along with bus services to other settlements. However, future occupants would still be likely to be generally dependent on the use of a private motor car to access services, facilities and employment in larger settlements.
21. As such, the location of the proposed development would conflict with the spatial strategy of the development plan, in particular its accessibility to services and facilities, namely WCS policies CP1, CP2 and CP14 and policy CP61.

Other Considerations

22. My attention has been drawn to various appeal decisions for housing developments in Wiltshire and areas outside Wiltshire which were found to be contrary to the Development Plan but were allowed due to the deficiency in housing land supply. However, they all have a different site and locational context and significantly none are located within National Landscape or the NWDNL. Accordingly, the circumstances are not directly comparable with those which apply in this appeal.
23. With regards to the appeal decision for the 2015 planning application, appeal reference APP/Y3940/W/16/3156940, as this relates to a parcel of land to the north of the appeal site with a proposed access via a narrow gap between two houses on Whittonditch Road as opposed to the wide gap between 'Ravensfield' and 'Wootton House' on Newtown Road, its effect on the street scene and scenic quality of the NWDNL is not comparable. In any case, I have reached my own conclusions on the appeal proposal on the basis of the evidence before me.
24. 'Rush Cottage' is located to the south of the site on the opposite side of Newtown Road and is a grade II listed building. 'Brookside' is also a grade II listed building and is located to the east of the site. Given the application is a PIP and the separation distance between the site and the listed buildings, it is conceivable that the proposal could be designed and positioned in such a way that it would not cause harm to the two listed buildings or their setting. In view of the above, I agree with the Council that heritage impacts would be more appropriately considered at the TDC stage, where the details of the built form and the site layout would be provided. Therefore, I have treated the proposal's impact on heritage assets as a neutral factor in this appeal.

Planning Balance

25. The Council accepts that it cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites and that it has a substantial shortfall amounting to 2.03 year's supply. This is significantly below Government expectations, and it is therefore evident that there is a pressing need for housing when considering this shortfall.
26. Socially, the proposal would deliver 4-5 new houses which would make a minor but nevertheless useful contribution to the Council's housing land supply and thus would contribute to the Government's objective to significantly boost the supply of homes. In economic terms, the proposal would provide construction jobs and some

local investment during its build out. When inhabited, its occupants would help to support the village's services and they would contribute to the wider local economy, for example via Council tax payments. Although a matter for the TDC stage, landscaping associated with the proposal would provide environmental benefits.

27. As discussed above, the proposed development would be in walking and cycling distance of local services. It would also be in a location with opportunities for travel by public transport. However, it is likely that the private motor car would still be relied upon as a convenient mode of transport to larger settlements.
28. Considering the 5-year housing land supply position, paragraph 11(d) of the Framework indicates that permission should be granted unless the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Footnote 7 of the Framework lists National Landscapes as one such asset of importance. As I have found harm to the National Landscape, this weighs against the proposal.
29. Overall, I consider that the combined benefits of the proposal attract moderate weight. However, considering the harm I have identified to the NWDNL, which provides a strong reason for refusing the development, there is no requirement to apply the test in paragraph 11d) ii) of the Framework. Consequently, the proposal does not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the proposal would conflict with CP1, CP2, CP14, CP51, CP57 and CP61 of the WCS.

Conclusion

30. The proposal would conflict with the development plan when considered as a whole and there are no other considerations which indicate that the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan and so the appeal is dismissed.

SE Hughes

INSPECTOR