



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 August 2025

by **A Wright BSc (Hons) MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/C1435/W/25/3362346

Oaks Farm, Horsted Lane, Isfield, East Sussex TN22 5TX

- 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 R Cook against the decision of Wealden District Council.
 - The application Ref is WD/2024/2221/O.
 - The development proposed is described as 'proposal for three detached houses, landscaping and parking'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. Outline planning permission is sought. The application includes matters of access, appearance, landscaping and scale, with layout a reserved matter. The plans include a proposed layout, but I have determined the appeal on the basis that this is for illustrative purposes only.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - whether the site would be a suitable location for housing, having regard to the provisions of the development plan and the accessibility of services and facilities; and
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Suitability of the location

4. Policy WCS6 of the Council's Core Strategy Local Plan 2013 (CS) identifies rural service, local and neighbourhood centres and settlements with development boundaries. The appeal site lies to the east of Isfield, a neighbourhood centre which was defined by a settlement boundary in the Wealden Local Plan 1998 (LP), but this boundary was revoked by policy WCS6 of the CS. Thus, the whole village is in the countryside for the purposes of planning policy. Given its proximity to other dwellings, the proposal would not be an isolated dwelling in the countryside which the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) aims to avoid. Nevertheless, saved Policies GD2 and DC17 of the LP seek to resist residential development outside development boundaries. As such, the proposal would be contrary to the Council's spatial strategy.

5. There is reference to the Council's Draft Local Plan March 2024 in which it suggests that Isfield could be defined as a secondary village with a development boundary and could provide some modest growth. The Sustainable Settlement Study March 2024 indicates that such villages have a good range of community services with at a minimum a frequent public transport service to a town to access retail, services, facilities and employment. For a recent appeal at Top Barn¹, based on the direction of travel for Isfield in the proposed Local Plan, the Council did not defend its reason for refusal relating to the location of that scheme. Nevertheless, although the policy approach towards Isfield may change in the future, I have little information on how this would affect the appeal site. In any event, the Draft Local Plan remains at the early stages of preparation, so I give it limited weight.
6. Saved Policy EN1 of the LP and spatial planning objectives SPO7 and SPO8 and Policy WCS14 of the CS seek to ensure that development is sustainable, including encouraging the reduction of the need to travel by car.
7. Isfield has a public house, farm shop, village hall and several other facilities including a children's playground and church. There are also some businesses, and a station serving the Lavender Line. Access to most shopping, employment, primary and secondary education, health and leisure facilities would require a journey at least as far as the nearest town of Uckfield, around 4km away.
8. A footpath along parts of Station Road connects some of the village facilities. The bus stops along Horsted Lane are also served by a small length of footpath to the junction with Station Road although accessing them from any direction requires bus users to walk along the roads. Whilst regular bus services to Uckfield, Lewes, Brighton and Tunbridge Wells would provide an alternative to the car during the day, they would not be available for journeys in the evenings.
9. The bus stops along Horsted Lane are less than a five minute walk from the appeal site, with the other village facilities further away. Horsted Lane is a surfaced country lane, and along this stretch of the road a 30mph speed limit applies, with drivers largely observing this speed limit on entering and exiting the national speed limit zone. The evidence indicates over 450 vehicles travelling each way along this part of the lane on weekdays and during my site visit I observed several vehicles using it. Given the number of vehicles using Horsted Lane on some days and that much of the road is subject to a 60mph speed limit, it is not clear that it would potentially qualify as a Quiet Lane.
10. There are some verges along Horsted Lane between the appeal site and the bus stops. However, there is no separate raised footway, and pedestrians are required to walk along the unlit lane, including on the carriageway, to access the bus stops and facilities in Isfield. This would deter future occupants of the development from walking along this route.
11. The Framework recognises that sustainable transport options vary between urban and rural areas. Nonetheless, it requires developments to prioritise sustainable transport modes and achieve suitable access to sites for all users. In this case, walking, cycling and use of buses would be an option for some trips by some people. However, the nature of the route to access the bus stops and village facilities would limit its attractiveness, particularly for older people, those with reduced mobility or with children and at times of darkness and bad weather. As

¹ Appeal ref: APP/C1435/W/24/3348203

such, I consider that the future occupiers of the proposed dwellings would be likely to be reliant on private vehicles to access services in Isfield and further away.

12. There are references to a proposal for two dwellings on land north of Boathouse Farm, Lewes Road², where the Inspector dismissed the appeal. There are some differences in the respective parts of Horsted Lane and Lewes Road, including the number of verges and traffic speeds. Nonetheless, the location of the site subject to the current appeal is likely to discourage future residents from accessing facilities on foot, by bike and by bus.
13. Working patterns have changed, with more home working meaning that not all members of households may need to leave the site for work. The Framework also indicates that planning policies should be flexible enough to allow for new and flexible working practices. Further, the provision of charging points would encourage the use of electric vehicles by future occupiers. Nevertheless, these factors would not prevent future residents relying on private vehicles to access services, and trips to and from the site by delivery vehicles.
14. There is reference to a permission for 10 dwellings granted on appeal in 2018 for land west of Culpepper Close³. In allowing the appeal, the Inspector was satisfied that the site had reasonable accessibility to services and facilities without being entirely dependent on the private car. His assessment took account of the fact that the footpath along Station Road would provide access for pedestrians to the village's facilities. Similar to the findings by the Inspector in the Boathouse Farm appeal, this makes the accessibility of the Culpepper Close proposal significantly different to the one before me.
15. The appellant also refers to the Council's approval of the conversion of a building into a craft studio with ancillary retail use on land adjacent to Filsham Lodge⁴, close to the appeal site. In that case, the Council recognised that the building is relatively well located to the village and that during the daytime opening hours customers may well walk or cycle. Nevertheless, the current proposal for residential properties would generate a need for occupiers to access services further afield, including in the evenings, and thus it substantially differs from the approved development at Filsham Lodge.
16. Further, there is reference to the Council's recommendation to approve the conversion of a building at Buxted⁵ where it noted that the proposed dwelling would be some distance from the Buxted local service centre and the neighbourhood centre at Maresfield. Nonetheless, in that case the Council found that the scheme complied with saved Policies DC6 and DC8 and no argument is made that the current proposal meets the rural exceptions in those policies.
17. In allowing an appeal for a new dwelling at Danehill⁶, an Inspector found that Church Lane has a quiet rural character and the absence of bespoke infrastructure along it would not curtail access to village services. In contrast, Horsted Lane provides the main route from Isfield onto the A26 for vehicles travelling north towards Uckfield and it is not a particularly quiet route nor safe for pedestrians.

² Appeal ref: APP/C1435/W/20/3263604

³ Appeal ref: APP/C1435/W/17/3178137

⁴ Planning application ref: WD/2020/0865/F

⁵ Planning application ref: WD/2023/1006/F

⁶ Appeal ref: APP/C1435/W/24/3345361

18. Consequently, I conclude that the site would not be a suitable location for housing, having regard to the provisions of the development plan and the accessibility of services and facilities. It would fail to comply with saved Policy EN1 of the LP and spatial planning objectives SPO7 and SPO8 and Policy WCS14 of the CS where they seek sustainable development which encourages the reduced need to travel by car. This would be in addition to the conflict with Policy WCS6 of the CS and saved Policies GD2 and DC17 of the LP which set out the rural areas strategy and strictly limit residential development in the countryside.

Character and appearance

19. The appeal site lies adjacent to Horsted Lane, at a higher level than the road alongside which is a dense boundary hedgerow and some large trees. It comprises grassland which continues beyond the low hedge to the west. There is linear built development along the opposite side of the lane, but on the north side of Horsted Lane development is more sporadic, limited to the adjacent properties at Oaks Farm and End House. The site forms a large area of open land in front of Oaks Farm which along with the boundary planting gives this part of the lane a verdant and spacious rural character.
20. The site is within the Low Weald where saved Policy EN8 of the LP seeks to conserve the character of the landscape. The LP indicates that the gently undulating topography of the Low Weald retains a strong rural character, primarily comprising an agricultural landscape punctuated by woods, hedgerow trees and field boundary hedges. It states that away from the main towns and A roads, the area is crossed by a lattice of narrow country lanes which has contributed to a general lack of intrusive or extensive development. As the site slopes gently upwards away from the lane, is undeveloped and has some boundary hedgerows, it positively contributes to the character of the Low Weald landscape.
21. The proposal is for three large two storey dwellings with a new access onto Horsted Lane. The introduction of houses, hardsurfacing for vehicular access and parking, boundary treatments and residential paraphernalia would result in significant urbanisation of this part of the lane, giving it a domestic appearance and harming its rural character.
22. The design of the proposed dwellings would relate to the rural vernacular and the illustrative layout plans indicate that the structures could be set back a similar distance from the road to some other buildings on Horsted Lane. However, the addition of three new houses would result in significant intensification of development, at odds with the limited, loose-knit pattern of development on this side of the lane and adversely affecting its spacious character.
23. The proposed development would not extend beyond the existing ribbon development on the opposite side of Horsted Lane. Nevertheless, given the size of the site and its position adjacent to open land to the west, the proposal would not comprise natural infill of the existing built envelope.
24. The new houses would have a similar scale to some other buildings nearby. However, whilst the location is not under consideration at this stage, due to their elevated position, size and likely position, the proposed buildings would appear unduly prominent.

25. The roadside boundary planting would be retained, providing some screening to the proposed scheme particularly during the spring and summer months when hedges and trees are in full leaf. Nonetheless, the proposed access and driveway would be evident from Horsted Lane, and new built development would be clearly visible through the new access, especially to those travelling westbound along the lane. Thus, the appeal scheme would harmfully erode the undeveloped landscape of the Low Weald.
26. The appellant refers to the removal of text in the Framework relating to the density of residential development and its impact on the character of the existing area. As this referred to urban areas and the appeal site is in the countryside, it is not applicable in this case.
27. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. This would be contrary to saved Policies EN8 and EN27 of the LP and spatial planning objectives SPO1 and SPO13 of the CS. Amongst other things, these seek to protect distinct landscapes, requiring proposals in the Low Weald to have regard to the setting of settlements, and require the scale and form of development to respect local character.

Other Matters

28. The Council did not find harm or development plan conflict in relation to several other matters, including living conditions, highways, parking, trees and ecology. However, even if I were to agree with the Council on these points, the absence of harm would be a neutral matter which would not carry weight in favour of the proposed scheme.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

29. The Council accepts that it has an under supply of housing against the required five years. The Council's Housing Land Supply Statement September 2024 indicates a 4.45 year supply for the five year period from 1 April 2024. However, the Housing Land Supply Statement updated in February 2025 to take account of subsequent changes to the Framework outlines that the Council has a 3.68 year supply for this period. The appellant states that the Council has not provided a sufficient supply of housing land for at least five years. Therefore, there is a significant shortfall and paragraph 11(d) of the Framework is engaged.
30. Paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the Framework confirms that in such circumstances, permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies including directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land and securing well-designed places.
31. The Framework seeks to significantly boost housing supply and highlights the important contribution small and medium sized sites can make. The proposal would contribute three family homes towards Wealden's housing supply, making a modest difference to addressing the shortfall, and therefore I attribute moderate weight to this benefit.
32. There would also be some economic benefits during construction when the development would provide jobs and opportunities for local companies and once

occupied when future residents would support services in Isfield. However, given the relatively small scale of the proposal, these benefits would be limited.

33. In contrast, the site would not be a suitable location for housing, and the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. This would conflict with the Framework where it requires developments to prioritise sustainable transport modes, achieve suitable access to sites for all users, and be sympathetic to local character. It would not provide a suitable windfall site for homes within an existing settlement. The proposal would also be contrary to saved Policies GD2, DC17, EN1, EN8 and EN27 of the LP and spatial planning objectives SPO1, SPO7, SPO8 and SPO13 and Policies WCS6 and WCS14 of the CS. Indeed, the adverse impacts of the scheme would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
34. For the reasons given above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan and the material considerations, including the Framework, do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

A Wright

INSPECTOR