
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 August 2025

by B Astley-Serougi BA(Hons) LLM MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/25/3366261

Land North of The Vale, Forest Road, Wokingham RG40 5QY

- 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 Mr & Mrs D Drew against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 250632.
 - The development proposed is erection of 1 no. dwelling and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal scheme relates to an outline proposal with all matters reserved for future consideration. I have considered the appeal accordingly. Plans have been submitted as part of the appeal which indicate how the proposed development could be accommodated on the site. I have taken these plans into account for indicative purposes.
3. The Council has referred to an emerging Local Plan at examination. However, I have not been provided with the emerging Local Plan and given it is at a relatively early stage, I have determined this appeal with reference to policies from the existing adopted development plan.
4. The parties were given the opportunity to provide comments regarding the appeal scheme and matters concerning its exemption from mandatory biodiversity net gain. I have had regard to any comments made by both parties.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are:
 - whether the appeal site is a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to local policy;
 - the effect of the proposed development on the Landscape Character Area I1: Ashridge Farmed and Clay Lowland (the LCA) and the surrounding area; and
 - the effect of the proposed development on the biodiversity within the site.

Reasons

Suitable Location

6. The parties agree that the appeal site is located outside of a defined settlement and therefore is in the countryside for planning purposes. Policy CP11 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document January 2010 (the CS) generally aims to protect the separate identities of settlements as well as maintain the quality of the environment. Consequently, it provides support for development in the countryside subject to certain criterion.
7. Given the appeal scheme is for one dwelling, there is limited substantive evidence before me to adequately demonstrate that the appeal scheme would contribute to a diverse and sustainable rural enterprise or other countryside-based enterprises and activities, nor would it contribute and/or promote recreation in, and enjoyment of the countryside. Therefore, it would not meet criterion 1 of Policy CP11. Accordingly, the appeal scheme would not benefit from support from Policy CP11 of the CS.
8. The appeal site is located outside of a settlement boundary. Central Wokingham, which is the principal settlement of the Borough and consequently has many facilities including supermarkets and railway station, is approximately 1.9 miles from the site and Binfield around 2 miles away. The latter contains shops, public houses, churches, primary schools and employment provision amongst other things.
9. The distances to these settlements are, in my judgement, significant when considering if future occupants would likely be reliant upon private motor vehicles. The closest bus stops to the appeal site are around 1.9km from the site. Furthermore, given the relatively high-speed limit of Forest Road and the lack of adequate footpaths, continuous cycle routes as well as limited street lighting, to my mind, it is likely that future occupants would be reliant upon private motor vehicles to access general facilities.
10. I note the acceptable proximity of Ashridge Manor Garden Centre to the appeal site as well as a primary school and nursery. However, this does not, to my mind, provide adequate general day-to-day facilities.
11. Moreover, the North Wokingham Strategic Development Location is sited within the defined settlement of Wokingham and therefore is not wholly comparable to the appeal site given it is not within a defined settlement. Additionally, I do not know the full circumstances of the houses on either Dalley Road or Diamond Jubilee Way which are referred to by the appellant. I therefore cannot be certain that they are wholly comparable to the appeal scheme before me. Notwithstanding this, each application is determined on its own merit.
12. Regarding the appeal decision at The Vale, I do not have the full details of the circumstances before me and therefore cannot be certain that it is wholly comparable to the appeal scheme before me. Nevertheless, each application is determined on its own merits and the appeal before me has been assessed against a different policy context.

13. Given all of the above, the appeal site is not a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to local policy and would not provide an adequate modal shift from private motor vehicle to more sustainable transport methods. Consequently, it would conflict with Policies CP1, CP3, CP6 and CP11 of the CS and Policies CC01 and CC02 of the Wokingham Borough Development Plan, Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 (the MDDLDP). These policies seek, amongst other things, to ensure that developments are in sustainable locations, provide choices in the mode of transport available and minimise the distance people need to travel.
14. The Council refers to Policies, CC03 and TB21 of the MDDLDP in its decision notice. However, they relate to green infrastructure, trees and landscaping as well as landscape character respectively. Additionally, it also refers to CP2 of the CS which refers to inclusive communities. Consequently, in this case, they are not determinative policies for this main issue.

Landscape Character

15. Given that the appeal before me is for outline planning permission with all matters reserved, the plans submitted are indicative. Consequently, the details regarding scale, layout, appearance, access and landscaping are not within the scope of this appeal.
16. Nevertheless, the principle of a residential dwelling located at the appeal site can be considered. The LCA is characterised by its strong rural character and therefore whilst I acknowledge there is other built form close to the appeal site, given the overall established building line on this part of Forest Road, the appeal scheme would, to my mind, result in the encroachment of built form into the countryside.
17. Whilst there would not be obvious views of the development from public vantage points this does not justify a development in an unsuitable location. It remains that the location of the proposed development on an undeveloped parcel of land would result in harm to the character and appearance of the LCA and the surrounding area for the reasons I have identified above.
18. Regarding an appeal decision at Land to the rear of Cherry Trees, I do not have the full circumstances of the appeal. I therefore cannot be certain that it is wholly comparable to the appeal scheme before me. Nevertheless, each application is determined on its own merit and given the site-specific context of the appeal before me, it does not lead me to a different conclusion.
19. Whilst I acknowledge that an outbuilding to the host dwelling has been erected, this does not lead me to a different conclusion regarding encroachment into the countryside given the aforementioned building line.
20. Given all of the above, the appeal scheme would result in harm to the character and appearance of the LCA and the surrounding area. It therefore would conflict with Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the CS and Policies CC02 and TB21 of the MDDLDP insofar as they seek to ensure that developments maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment, including the relevant landscape character.

21. It is for the same reasons that it would also fail to accord with the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2019 (online version).

Biodiversity

22. On 12 February 2024, the provisions of the Environment Act 2021 relating to biodiversity net gain (BNG) came into force for major developments, and on the 2 April 2024 for smaller sites.
23. Under Article 7(1A) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015 (the DMPO), all applications for planning permission submitted after those dates are required to be accompanied by certain information relating to BNG, except where one of the exemptions specified in the legislation applies. The information required includes a declaration as to whether the applicant believes the BNG provisions apply to the application, and if not, the reasons why. Where none of the exemptions apply, the applicant should provide a completed biodiversity metric calculation, demonstrating the on-site habitat value as well as a number of other related details which are listed in sub-paragraph (c) of the aforementioned Article.
24. The appellant has indicated on the application form and within their appeal documents that the appeal scheme would be self-build development and thus would be exempt from BNG. Additionally, they have provided a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) claiming exemption on the basis of self-build development.
25. To qualify as self-build and custom development, for the purposes of the relevant BNG legislation, the development would need to comply with the definition contained in Section 1(A1) of the Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015. It establishes that the new dwelling must be occupied by the person or persons responsible for carrying out or commissioning the building. The appellant has stated that they would be the future occupants of the dwelling.
26. Nevertheless, there is no legal mechanism to secure the status of the proposed development as self-build. There is no legally binding S106 agreement or undertaking before me and I do not have the power to impose one.
27. Thus, whilst I acknowledge that the appellant's intention is to build and occupy the proposed dwelling, this is not enough, on its own, to qualify as a self-build or custom development.
28. The Council has suggested a condition which requires (prior to commencement of development), the details of the initial occupier who would have primary input into the design and layout of the dwellings, as well as requiring them to be the occupant unless otherwise agreed by the local planning authority. However, this would fail to satisfy the tests in paragraph 57 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
29. Given all of the above, I am not satisfied in this case that it has been demonstrated that the proposed scheme could be secured as a self-build development. Whilst the above two main issues are sufficient to dismiss the appeal, this issue is a further matter against the appeal scheme.

Other Matters

30. The Council has stated that they are only able to demonstrate a housing land supply of 1.7 years. This is considerably below the housing land supply they are expected to deliver in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Whilst the proposal would only deliver one unit this would nonetheless be valuable in boosting the housing stock in circumstances where there is a significant shortfall.
31. A lack of objection at this stage from the Council regarding flood risk, surface water flooding or residential amenity are neutral factors in this case.

Planning Balance

32. As set out above, the appeal scheme would result in a dwelling in an unsuitable location and would harm the character and appearance of the LCA and the surrounding area. It has also not been adequately demonstrated that the appeal scheme could be secured as self-build and consequently cannot benefit from the relevant exemption from the legal requirements relating to BNG. It would therefore conflict with the development plan as a whole. However, because of the Council's housing land supply position, paragraph 11 d) of the Framework is engaged.
33. The proposal would deliver an additional housing unit in a Borough that is falling significantly below the level of housing required by national policy. One unit would make a modest contribution as indicated in paragraph 73 of the Framework.
34. Nevertheless, the adverse impacts I have identified above would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal when assessed against the Framework policies as a whole.
35. There are no other material considerations of such weight or significance to justify a decision other than in accordance with the development plan.

Conclusion

36. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

B Astley-Serougi

INSPECTOR