
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 October 2025

by R Gravett BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4 November 2025.

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/25/3371082

Land at Church Lane, Church Lane, Highclere RG20 9RG

- 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 Belgrave Homes against the decision of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/01914/FUL.
 - The development proposed is erection of 2no. 3 bed dwellings with access and parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. Since the Council made its decision, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030 (LMP) has been adopted. The main parties have been provided with an opportunity to comment on its relevance to the determination of this appeal, which I have taken into account.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character of the area, with particular regards its effect on the landscape and scenic beauty of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is within the countryside and within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape ('the National Landscape'). In addition to the statutory duty at section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) provides that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection.
5. The Council's 'Landscape Character Assessment' (2021) (LCA) identifies the appeal site as within the 'Highclere and Burghclere' area, which is characterised by coverage of a medium to small-scale mosaic of woodland, some mixed farmland and many paddocks, creating a relatively enclosed, well-treed and intimate character. The LMP describes historic settlement patterns and valued green spaces within the surrounding settlements as forming part of the distinctive character of the National Landscape, and it identifies the appeal site as being within a landscape type which is characterised as being 'small-scale and intimate.' The appeal site has attributes of this landscape character. It comprises a paddock

on the corner of Church Lane and Andover Road (A343), which forms part of a network of green spaces consisting of other paddocks, fields and pockets of woodland which extend from Andover Road to the east providing an open, rural character and setting to Highclere.

6. There are glimpsed views through gaps along the Andover Road and Church Lane frontage, but the existing trees and hedgerows enclose the site on three sides. Although not part of a visually expansive landscape, I observed that from the field gate on the Andover Road frontage, there are longer views to the east over the appeal site, and the network of fields and paddocks beyond. These longer views are contained by a wide and deep block of deciduous woodland, broadly in the direction of Highclere Park, which gives a particularly verdant, but partly enclosed and intimate landscape character.
7. Beyond the eastern boundary are dwellings which front onto Church Lane, a narrow country lane. To the south of the appeal site on either side of Andover Road, the pattern of development is broadly linear with dwellings informally arranged on large plots with generous and mature landscaping, particularly along the road frontage. Despite the busy road and neighbouring dwellings, the appeal site makes a modest but nonetheless, positive contribution to the landscape character of the area, and to the National Landscape.
8. The appellant has sought to address the concerns raised by the Inspector in respect of the previous appeal proposal for 4no semi-detached dwellings on the site, which was dismissed in November 2023 ('the 2023 scheme').¹ The appeal proposal is for 2no. detached dwellings which would be a reduction in the number of units, and would lead to a reasonable reduction in overall footprint of development and amount of hardstanding. It would fill a logical 'gap' between the existing dwellings known as 'Brackendale' and 'Blackford Cottage,' and would continue the existing linear pattern of residential development along this side of Andover Road.
9. However, the construction of 2no. large, two-storey dwellings would still introduce a significant quantum of built form, which would extend across much of the width of the site, and in an area where there is currently none. A wide driveway and generous areas of hardstanding are proposed which includes 2 no. vehicle parking spaces for each dwelling, a visitor parking space and turning areas. The gardens would wrap around the dwellings, and these would also likely attract domestic paraphernalia, including areas of patio and boundary fencing. Together, this would have a harmful suburbanising effect, which is identified in the LMP as having the potential to significantly influence the valued qualities of the National Landscape.
10. The proposed dwellings would be seen in the context of neighbouring dwellings and views would be localised, mainly from Andover Road or through gaps in the existing hedgerow on the Church Lane corner. A mature Hazel tree which overhangs the field gate at the entrance would be removed, and another coppiced to ground level which would open views of the site from Andover Road. From here, the closest dwelling would be prominent, as would the driveway, parking and turning areas. The retention of and introduction of further landscaping may be capable of softening the effects of the proposed development, but much of the open, verdant landscape quality of the appeal site, and the important views

¹ APP/H1705/W/23/3316420

through to the network of fields, paddocks, and the woodland beyond would be lost. This would be to the detriment of the rural character and setting of Highclere.

11. Therefore, I conclude that the proposed development would cause harm to the character of the area, and the landscape and scenic beauty of the National Landscape. Although such harm would be relatively minor, having regard to my statutory duty, I find the proposal would neither conserve nor enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape. Moreover, despite being 'scaled back,' the proposed development has not reduced the landscape harm to such an extent that I am satisfied it overcomes the concerns raised by the Inspector in respect of the 2023 scheme.
12. The appeal proposal would conflict with policies EM1 and EM10 of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2011-2029) (2016). Together these require development to contribute positively to local distinctiveness and respect, enhance and not be detrimental to the character or visual amenity of the landscape, paying regard to the qualities identified in the LCA, landscape features, scenic quality and the setting of a settlement.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

13. There is no dispute between the parties that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing sites. In such circumstances, paragraph 11d) of the Framework advises that planning permission should be granted, unless policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a strong reason for refusing the application, or any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. In accordance with Footnote 7 of the Framework, the policies in the Framework that protect National Landscapes provide a strong reason for refusing this development. Therefore, the presumption in favour of development as set out in paragraph 11d) of the Framework is not engaged.
14. Nevertheless, the proposal would contribute to the Council's housing supply through the delivery of 2no. additional 3-bedroom dwellings. This would align with the Framework where it seeks to significantly boost the supply of housing and where it acknowledges that small-scale sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirements of an area, often built out relatively quickly. The proposal would also meet an identified local housing need for 3-bedroom dwellings, albeit the Highclere Housing Need Assessment (2021) suggests the focus should be on smaller or modest sized dwellings given the strong bias towards larger properties in the existing stock. Furthermore, the proposal would make efficient use of a site that is accessible to shops, local facilities and transport modes. Despite delivering only two dwellings, given there is a substantial shortfall in housing supply, these benefits attract moderate weight.
15. Although paragraph 130 of the Framework recognises that it is important that planning decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, for the reasons I have given above, I am not satisfied that the proposed development makes optimal use of the potential of the appeal site. However, the proposal would be of high-quality, would retain the existing hedgerows and most established trees and would include new planting, including an area of wildflower meadow and individual trees. It would also benefit the local economy in terms of creating employment opportunities during construction, and additional support for local services would be generated

by future occupiers of the dwellings. Whilst I also afford these benefits moderate weight, compliance with the mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain would attract only neutral weight.

16. There are some clear benefits of the proposed development, and I have given them moderate weight in my consideration of the appeal. However, they are not sufficient in this case to outweigh the harm identified to the character of the area, and to the National Landscape, which I afford great weight. The proposal conflicts with the development plan, and material considerations, including those benefits identified above, do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it.
17. For the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

R Gravett

INSPECTOR