



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 October 2025

by **D Wilson BSc (Hons) MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/25/3365843

125 Strongrove Hill, Hungerford, Berkshire RG17 0SJ

- 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 David Withers against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/02022/FUL.
 - The development proposed is erection of a single detached three bedroom house and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. Since the determination of the planning application by the Council, the Council have adopted the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025) (LP). I have therefore determined this appeal with regard to the up-to-date planning policy position.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposed development would be appropriately located having regard to the Councils development plan,
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, including whether it would conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and whether the design would be exceptional, and
 - whether surface water would be managed in a sustainable manner through the implementation of Sustainable Drainage Methods (SuDS).

Reasons

Whether an appropriate location

4. The appeal site is located within the open countryside where Policy DM1 of the LP relates to residential development in the Countryside. It sets out criteria where new residential development would be permitted, none of which would be met by the proposed development.

5. There is no dispute between the parties that the proposed dwelling would not be isolated and as such the consideration of the supporting text which outlines that in particularly exceptional cases there may be a very special circumstance where an isolated new home of truly outstanding design standards, reflecting the highest standards of architecture, is proposed is limited. In any case, while the appeal site would not be isolated, the dwelling would still be located within the open countryside and is therefore still contrary to the requirements of Policy DM1 of the LP.
6. I note that both parties refer to Paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), but this seeks to avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside. As there is no dispute that the proposed dwelling would not be isolated, Paragraph 84 of the Framework is not relevant to the development proposed.
7. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would not be appropriately located and would be contrary to Policies SP1, SP12 and DM1 of the LP. Amongst other things, these outline the Council's spatial strategy and approach to housing delivery which seeks to ensure that housing development is limited when located within the open countryside.

Character and appearance

8. The appeal site is a mostly overgrown and wooded parcel of land which is accessed by Strongrove Hill. The site is accessed by a track which is steeply set down from Strongrove Hill and also provides access to several other houses. While there is some built form close to the appeal site, the wider area is dominated by large open fields, the River Dun and associated natural vegetation which results in a tranquil and verdant character and appearance which the appeal site makes a positive contribution to.
9. The appeal site is located within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (the National Landscape). Paragraph 187 of the Framework seeks to ensure that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. Paragraph 189 requires that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes.
10. The proposed dwelling would have a traditional and predominantly symmetrical frontage with a pitched roof and central gable with windows either side, which is generally in keeping with other dwellings nearby. The rear of the dwelling is proposed to be two storeys with a flat roof, with part of this change in design being visible from one side of the dwelling when looking towards the frontage.
11. There is little visual interest from the design of the two-storey rear element of the proposal and the part visible section to the side means that it would appear odd and bulky, resulting in a clash with the design of the remainder of the dwelling. It is also proposed to be coated in off white render which would only highlight the bulky design. I note that many of the design aspects have been guided by achieving the best living conditions for future occupiers as well as for making the most out of renewable energy, however, this does not outweigh the harm I have identified.

12. The overall size of the dwelling, including its overall height, combined with the design of the two-storey, flat roofed element would result in a dominant development that would be harmful to the tranquil and verdant character and appearance of the area. For the same reasons, I do not consider that the proposed dwelling would be of exceptional design.
13. The topography and well vegetated character of the area would limit some views from the wider area. However, the overall size and height of the dwelling would still result in a dominant appearance, particularly from the public right of way which runs past the appeal site. I also note that an acoustic fence is proposed high on the bank to the rear of the proposal and that potential works to the vegetation bordering the site would be required. While I note the reasoning behind the fence, it would nonetheless stand out as odd and jarring within the wider context of the area and highlight the development, with the potential for views from the road.
14. I note that there are commercial developments near to the appeal site, which are also located within the National Landscape. However, these sit within a different context which is more open but closely linked to Hungerford. The appeal site is within a different context which is tranquil and verdant with the commercial development not being appreciated from this location.
15. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area, fail to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the National Landscape and would not be of exceptional design. It would be contrary to Policies SP2, SP7 and SP8 of the LP which amongst other things, seek to ensure that development conserves and enhances the special landscape qualities of the National Landscape, strengthen a sense of place and is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.

SuDS

16. Policy SP6 of the LP relates to flood risk and states that on all development sites; in order to restrict or reduce runoff, surface water will be managed in a sustainable manner through the implementation of SuDS.
17. The appellant states that the proposed SuDS design was used for a previous planning application on the site, which the appellant considers was found to be acceptable to the Council at the time. The Council raise concern over missing information which includes the location of infiltration testing and information on whether the proposed living roof would cope, should a large storm event occur.
18. In regard to the locations where the infiltration testing took place, while I acknowledge the additional information submitted with the appeal, this only outlines that the infiltration testing was carried out where the ground level is accessible. This is vague and does not provide a precise area to which the testing took place and while I note that the location has not changed since a previous application, this is still not before me to consider. I therefore cannot establish that it was undertaken in an appropriate location relative to the proposed development.

19. In regard to the proposed living roof, the appellant states that this is not designed to hold water and while it has advantages through the plants being able to take rainfall, any excess is proposed to be captured by a storage tank or a soakaway which is shown on the plans. This appears to clarify the position and would be acceptable.
20. Notwithstanding the living roof, I am not satisfied that sufficient information has been submitted in order to demonstrate that the appeal scheme would provide SuDS. It would be contrary to Policy SP6 of the LP which amongst other things, seeks to ensure that surface water will be managed in a sustainable manner through the implementation of Sustainable Drainage Methods SuDS.

Other Matters

21. The appellant has referred another development in an attempt to justify the proposed development. I do not have the full details in respect of such examples so I cannot be sure of the circumstances. In any case, I have determined the appeal on its own merits, based on the evidence before me.
22. However, in regard to land at Tudor Avenue Chieveley¹, while I have been provided with limited information about this development, on the basis of the comparative elevations, the appeal proposals lack of visual interest, odd side extension and bulky rear stands out.
23. The appellant states that the proposed development would be self-build, however, there is no completed planning obligation before me which would secure the proposed development for self-built and as such, this attracts no weight in favour of the appeal scheme.
24. There is disagreement between the parties in terms of whether parts of the appeal site constitute previously developed land. However, even if I were to accept the appeal site was previously developed land, this would not be a significant benefit in favour of the appeal scheme.
25. I note that there is some local support for the proposed development through the use of land that is currently overgrown and unused as well as the additional benefits that could arise through improving the access and road, however this support does not outweigh the harm I have identified.
26. The appellant raises concerns that the planning committee did not consider the application correctly and also with errors within the Councils case, however, I am only in a position to consider the planning merits of the appeal before me.
27. The Council have found that the proposed development would provide adequate living conditions for future occupiers. However, while I have no reason to conclude otherwise, this is a neutral matter.

¹ Council's reference 24/00657/FUL

Planning Balance

28. The Council is able to demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing, however, the proposed development would nonetheless contribute to the supply of new homes. This attracts significant weight in favour of the proposed development. The proposal would also support the creation of jobs directly and indirectly during construction and result in future occupiers spending in the locality.
29. While I have found that the proposed development would not be of exceptional design, the proposed dwelling would demonstrate some innovative design through, amongst other things, the use of an internal air heating and cooling system, collection of solar energy, internal air filtration system, self-sufficient water and waste systems. These matters in combination would result in carbon neutral home and it is intended to be constructed to passive house standards. These benefits would attract weight in favour of the appeal scheme, particularly in light of the Council claiming a climate emergency, however, due to the small scale of the proposal, this would only be moderate weight.
30. Taking the above matters into account, the benefits would not outweigh the harm to the National Landscape, character and appearance of the area and SuDS. As such, the proposal would conflict with the development plan when considered as a whole.

Conclusion

31. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

D Wilson

INSPECTOR