



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 October 2025

by A Knight BA PG Dip MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19th November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/W/25/3367506

6 Searle Road, Farnham, Surrey GU9 8LJ

- 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 Powell against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is WA/2024/00875.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a dwelling with all matters reserved save for means of access, layout and scale.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Following agreement between the main parties during the application, the appeal before me relates to an outline proposal with access, layout, and scale to be considered at this stage, and with appearance and landscaping reserved for future consideration. I have determined the appeal accordingly. Images and plans have been provided showing how the proposed development may look. I have taken these into account for indicative purposes only.
3. The decision notice gave five reasons for refusal. The Council confirms that, following receipt of the appellants statement and having considered further the matter of internal floor to ceiling heights, the third reason for refusal is withdrawn. The fifth reason for refusal has been overcome following clarification, including within a recent appeal¹, as to the threshold at which new residential development may be expected to significantly affect the integrity of nearby Wealden Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). I see no reason to take a different view to the Council on these matters and proceed accordingly.
4. The fourth reason for refusal relates to impacts on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. I shall address this matter later in my determination.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on:
 - the character and appearance of the area; and
 - living conditions for occupiers of 5 and 6 Stratford Court, with particular regard to outlook.

¹ Appeal Ref APP/R3650/W/2024/3358096.

Reasons

Character and appearance

6. The appeal site is in a largely suburban neighbourhood which, whilst somewhat mixed overall in terms of architectural style and density, is nevertheless comprised of distinct and readily identifiable elements. One of these is Searle Road, part of the Firgrove character area identified in the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan (2020).
7. For the purposes of the appeal, Searle Road is a pleasant cul-de-sac characterised, in the main, by traditional detached dwellings on reasonably large plots. Whilst the design of houses along the road varies, there is a broad consistency to the building lines and to the orientation of the dwellings. Most front boundaries are marked by hedgerows, and several mature trees are dotted along the pavements edge. These features give the road a pleasing sense of cohesion.
8. Rear gardens on the northern side of the road are generous in size and, modest domestic sheds, garages and suchlike aside, are largely open and laid to lawn. Though they vary in width, they are consistent in depth, such that their rear boundaries form an identifiable line on a broadly northeast/southwest axis. This establishes a dividing line between the main body of Searle Road and development beyond it to the north.
9. Stratford Court is a residential development immediately north of Searle Road. It is arranged in a tight, inward facing cluster and has a notably higher density than Searle Road, with smaller buildings, plots, and gardens. The marked distinction between the two environments is emphasised by the land falling away noticeably at the boundary, with Stratford Court being on much lower ground.
10. Searle Road draws much of its beneficial character and charm from its cohesion and spaciousness. Rear gardens on the northern side of the road both display and contribute to these characteristics, and the significant contrast between Searle Road and Stratford Court highlights them further.
11. The appeal site is a detached property on the northern side of Searle Road. It is proposed to erect a detached dwelling in the northernmost corner of the rear garden, behind an existing garage. It would be some 6m tall to its ridge, 12m wide, and 8m deep at the most. Part of the existing garden would be segregated off and allocated to the new dwelling, as would the existing garage. Additional forecourt parking would be created for the existing dwelling.
12. Whilst the new dwelling would largely be screened from the road by a combination of distance, the fall of the land, and the existing garage, it would be visible either partly or in full from the appeal site, from neighbouring gardens, and from neighbouring buildings. Whatever appearance it may ultimately take, it would be far larger than any existing domestic outbuilding nearby, and lead to a second set of residents at the appeal site, most likely along with additional domestic vehicles, movements, light, sound, and paraphernalia. Given the above, the dwelling would be highly prominent.
13. As a consequence of its height, position, and use, the appeal scheme dwelling would be wholly at odds with, and harmfully invasive to, the undeveloped, spacious, and secluded feel of rear gardens along the northern side of Searle

Road, whilst also undermining the cohesion from which the road draws much of its beneficial character.

14. I recognise that examples of existing backland development are found at numbers 12 and 12A Searle Road. These, however, are located far further from the road, beyond the line of rear boundaries described above. As such, these existing dwellings do not impinge upon the uniform depth and openness of gardens along the main body of Searle Road. They are significantly different to the appeal scheme in that regard, and I attach little weight to their presence as a result.
15. Mature planting marks many garden boundaries along Searle Road, including at the appeal site. Whilst this would assist in softening the appearance of the proposed dwelling, it would be prominent nonetheless due to its height and size and the intermittent nature of the tree coverage. Whilst additional planting may be agreed through reserved matters, I have little reason to feel that trees which could be planted around the new dwelling in such a way as to significantly reduce its visual impact throughout the year would not also create an oppressive environment for its occupants and immediate neighbours. Any such trees would, in any event, likely take a long time to reach maturity.
16. The appellant has drawn my attention to what they consider a misquoting of the Farnham Design Statement (2010) (FDS) in the Council's evidence; it is argued that the FDS in fact prioritises protecting the character of the southern side of Searle Road. The version of the FDS provided as an appendix to the appellants statement is marked as a draft. The version provided by the Council is not, and is dated to 2010. The latter does not distinguish between the north and south sides of Searle Road. In any event, I see no reason to consider the character and appearance of the northern side unworthy of protection.
17. For these reasons, I conclude that the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area. As such, it conflicts with Policy TD1 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan (Part 1) (2018), Policy DM4 of the Local Plan (Part 2) (2023), and Policies FNP1 and FNP15 of the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan, which require development to respond to and reinforce the distinctive local character of the area in which it is located.

Living conditions

18. Homes at 5 and 6 Stratford Court (No 5 and No 6) are located immediately north of the appeal site. Both have south-facing windows onto open garden areas. The gardens are secluded, well maintained and, in the case of No5, include a paved seating area near the boundary with the appeal site. This is in the widest and most open part of what appears to be a partly communal garden. Overall, it is likely to be highly valued as an amenity area.
19. The fall in ground levels is such that the gardens at Stratford Court are noticeably lower than the appeal site. Such a change in levels has an inherent potential to create an oppressive sense of enclosure on the lower ground. In this instance, however, the effect is mitigated significantly by the composition of south and southeastern views from Stratford Court. Whilst there is mature greenery on the boundary with the appeal site, a gap exists in it near the location of the proposed dwelling. This, and the absence of development on the appeal site, at least near the boundary, allows wide views of open sky from Stratford Court, which in turn provides a sense of openness for its occupiers.

20. Whilst the proposed dwelling would be set back from the site boundary by 2m, at some 6m tall to its ridge and 8m deep, it would nevertheless have a considerable presence. This would be exacerbated by the change in levels between the appeal site and Stratford Court, such that the dwelling would significantly impinge upon the open outlook from No 5 and No 6. It would have a particularly harmful effect on the garden of the former, including the seating area described above.
21. A certificate of lawfulness² has been issued for the erection of an incidental outbuilding at the appeal site. I do not doubt that the prospect of it being built is greater than theoretical, though I must consider what weight to attribute to the fallback position it provides.
22. The proposed dwelling and the lawful outbuilding would serve such different purposes that there is little evident reason to associate them, or to believe that the refusal of the appeal scheme would make the erection of the outbuilding more likely. Moreover, the lawful outbuilding would be some 1.5m shallower and 2m shorter than the proposed dwelling. It would also not result in a second set of residents, domestic vehicles, movements, light, sound, and paraphernalia. Overall, I attach little weight to the prospect of the lawful outbuilding in respect of either main issue.
23. The proposed development would have a harmful effect on living conditions for occupiers of 5 and 6 Stratford Court, with particular regard to outlook. As such it conflicts with Policy TD1 of the Local Plan (Part 1) (2018) and Policies DM1 and DM5 of the Local Plan (Part 2) (2023) where they require new development to improve quality of life and health and well-being, and avoid significant harm to the health or amenity of occupants of nearby land and buildings.

Other Matters

24. The fourth reason for refusal relates to impacts on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. The Thames Basin Heaths Avoidance Strategy allows for mitigation in the form of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces and Strategic Access Management and Monitoring. The Council acknowledges that a Unilateral Undertaking supplied by the appellant, in which financial contributions of £2,497.07 and £846.10 would be made, would ensure compliance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and Thames Basin Heaths Avoidance Strategy, and overcome the fourth reason for refusal.
25. The position in respect of the undertaking is not clear. In any event, the contributions in question are to mitigate the effects of the development; they are not benefits capable of affecting the planning balance so as to overcome the harm to character and appearance and living conditions I have identified above. It has therefore not been necessary for me to consider the matters raised in the fourth reason for refusal.

Planning Balance

26. The provisions of paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) are engaged. The Council has only 1.28 years housing land supply, a figure representing a highly significant shortfall.

² Application Ref WA/2025/01307.

27. The appeal scheme would result in an additional dwelling that could be built quickly, helping towards undersupply in the Borough, and supporting the wider Governmental aim of significantly boosting housing supply. A mix of temporary and lasting economic benefits would accrue from the construction phase and residential occupation respectively. These benefits attract positive weight in my determination in and of themselves, and that weight is increased in this instance by the local housing land supply position.
28. The site is in a sustainable location, and the appeal scheme would make effective use of land. The appeal scheme accords strongly to the aims of the Framework in these regards. However, the Framework also considers the creation of high quality buildings and places to be fundamental to the planning and development process, an aim including the creation of places which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users. There is a high degree of correlation between the Framework and the Local Plan in these regards. Overall, the harm the appeal scheme would cause to the character and appearance of the area and to living conditions for neighbouring occupiers would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits identified above.

Conclusion

29. 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. The appeal is dismissed.

A Knight

INSPECTOR