



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 January 2026

by Rachel Hall BSc MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26th February 2026

Appeal: APP/K0425/W/25/3374852

**Land west of Wrekin, Bledlow Road, Saunderton, Princes Risborough,
Buckinghamshire HP27 9NG**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant permission in principle.
 - The appeal is made by Mr John Rowley of Livedin against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council - West Area (Wycombe).
 - The application reference is 25/06270/PIP.
 - The development proposed is described as 'a phased development of between 4 and 5 self-build dwellings'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal is for permission in principle. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that this is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The permission in principle consent route has 2 stages: the first stage (or permission in principle stage) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle and the second ('technical details consent') stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these 2 stages.
3. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent technical details consent application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.
4. As the proposal is located in the vicinity of a listed building, the Grade II* listed Church of St Mary, I have had special regard to section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) (the Act).
5. A Grade II listed building, Church Farm Cottage, is also in the locality. The Council did not identify harm to the significance of that cottage or any of its features of special architectural or historic interest as a result of the proposal. On the evidence before me, including my own observations, I am satisfied that the proposal would preserve the significance of that asset.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is whether the site is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development, with particular regard to:

- the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, bearing in mind the special attention that should be paid to the desirability of preserving the setting as it relates to the special interest of the Grade II* listed Church of St Mary (Ref 1332059) (the church); and
- the Council's development strategy and the accessibility of the appeal site by sustainable transport modes.

Reasons

Character and appearance and setting of Grade II listed building*

7. In the vicinity of the appeal site, houses on Bledlow Road (the road) are positioned behind generous front drives and gardens, to a broadly consistent building line. This results in a linear form of development. Houses are also set within generous plots with space between dwellings providing views of gardens and open space beyond. This creates a spacious feel. For much of this stretch of road between the railway bridge and just beyond the appeal site, there are houses either on one side of the road or the other. In combination with a lack of pavements and mature vegetation lining undeveloped sections of the road, this creates a distinctly rural character. This rural character is further supported by the unmade footpath that runs along one side of the appeal site, crosses the road and continues in a roughly northerly direction.
8. In addition, the appeal site has mature vegetation at its boundaries and predominantly grassed areas and trees within. The five bar gate at its entrance from the road and the pedestrian gate along its boundary with the footpath provide views into the appeal site. Consequently, its mature vegetation and open, rural attributes make a positive contribution to the character of the area.
9. The church was rebuilt in 1888-91 and incorporates restored fourteenth century windows and doorways. It is comprised of flint with stone dressings and has a shingled bell tower and a timber framed porch. A three light traceried window on its eastern elevation is described as nineteenth century. The historic context of this church would have been as a focal point in a rural village setting. The current context in which it is experienced comprises a mix of historic and modern buildings but remains a rural village within a wider agrarian landscape. A footpath leads from the graveyard adjacent to the church and connects with the footpath that runs past/through the appeal site. This rural setting contributes to the special interest and significance of the church. Although foliage screens the church from views in and around the appeal site, the rural character of the church's wider setting contributes in a meaningful way to its special interest and significance.
10. Given the above, I find that the setting of the church, insofar as it relates to this appeal and its special interest, to be primarily associated with green spaces and footpaths in its immediate and wider surroundings. Despite a changing context in which the modern built form of the care home now borders the church grounds, the appeal site survives as a largely undeveloped, green space. It thus retains a sense of open countryside and rurality that is discernible within the wider setting of the church. As such, the appeal site makes a positive contribution to the wider setting of the church.
11. The proposal seeks in principle permission for a minimum of four and a maximum of five houses. There is conflicting evidence from the main parties as to the extent

to which the site would be constrained by flood risk. Nonetheless, even accepting the appellant's position that the site is wholly within flood zone 1, the tree preservation order that covers the site would likely considerably limit the extent of developable area. Moreover, the site is in any event relatively narrow.

Consequently, it seems to me that delivery of four to five houses would result in an uncharacteristically dense form of development, with built form and a new access road extending across the length of the appeal site. As such, even the provision of the minimum of four dwellings would result in an unduly suburban form of development, at odds with the linear and spacious pattern of development that is characteristic here. Notwithstanding the appellant's experience in delivering self build schemes, no robust site specific evidence indicates otherwise.

12. I note that houses on Trout Hollow are arranged on a cul-de-sac. Nonetheless, those are set back from the road such that the arrangement of houses there appears spacious. Also, they are separated from the linear form of development that leads up to the appeal site and thus are viewed in a different context. Whereas, for the above reasons I am not persuaded that a similarly spacious form of development could be achieved here. As such, and although mature vegetation currently prevents direct visibility between the appeal site and the church, the proposal would undermine the open qualities of the site. This would result in harm to the wider setting of the church.
13. I am mindful of the in-principle nature of the proposal and that there would be an opportunity to resolve detailed matters at the technical details consent stage. Even so, I find that this could not adequately avoid or minimise the identified harm to the setting of the church, as it would not overcome the central objections to the urbanising effect of four or five new houses in this location.
14. Given the above, the location and amount of the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. The urbanising effect of the proposal would also harm the rural setting of the church. The identified harm to the special interest of the church attracts great weight in the planning balance of this appeal.
15. Paragraph 212 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 213 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets and that any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification.
16. Given that the impact of the proposal would be limited to part of the setting of the listed building, I find the harm to the special interest of the church to be at the lower end of less than substantial in this instance, but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. Where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, paragraph 215 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimal viable use.
17. The creation of a maximum of five new homes would be a public benefit of the proposal. In light of the extent of the Council's identified shortfall against their five year housing land supply I afford this contribution significant weight. In addition, the appellant submits that the Council has not granted enough self build permissions to satisfy their duty under the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding

Act 2015 (as amended), falling well short of its requirement. No substantive evidence is before me to the contrary. In the event of the appeal proposal reaching technical details consent stage, it seems reasonably likely that a legal agreement could secure a commitment to delivering the homes as self build. Consequently, the appeal scheme's contribution to that shortfall also attracts significant weight.

18. The appellant has drawn attention to a number of other appeal decisions¹ in which significant or substantial weight is afforded to the benefit associated with modest self build housing schemes. I have also afforded significant weight here and therefore consider that my approach is broadly consistent with the weighting in those other decisions. There would also be modest social and economic benefits associated with the construction and occupation of the proposal.
19. Even so, I find that the combination of these public benefits would not be sufficient to outweigh the great weight afforded to the less than substantial harm to the significance of the church.
20. Given the above and in the absence of public benefits that would outweigh the harm that would be caused, I conclude that, on balance, the proposal would fail to preserve the special historic interest of the Grade II* listed building. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 210(a) of the Framework and would conflict with policy CP11, DM31 and DM44 of the Wycombe District Local Plan (2019) (LP) and Policy 1 of the Bledlow-cum-Saunderton Neighbourhood Plan (2017) (NP). These seek, among other things, to ensure that developments are located having regard to the effect on the surrounding character including the historic environment.

Development strategy

21. It is not a matter in dispute between the main parties that the appeal site lies outside of the settlement boundaries established in the LP and the NP. Even if part of the site constitutes previously developed land by virtue of the existing buildings and structures on site, I have found that the proposal would harm the rural character of its surroundings. Thus it would not satisfy any of the criteria under Policy DM44 of the LP under which proposals outside settlements would be acceptable. Both the LP and the NP seek to focus development within settlement boundaries and therefore the location conflicts with the development strategies of the LP and NP.
22. With respect to the accessibility of the appeal site by sustainable transport modes, a national cycle network route in the vicinity of the appeal site would enable some trips to be made by bicycle for those that are physically able. Also, Princes Risborough railway station is said to be a circa 800m walk from the appeal site providing access to services to London. Therefore, there would be opportunities for some travel by non-car modes in the event of the appeal being allowed. However, there are constraints to the suitability of pedestrian routes from the appeal site to access services and facilities, including the railway station. This is due to the routes involving walking on roads without pavements or lighting, and over a vehicular bridge also with no pavement. Other pedestrian routes involve cross country footpaths that would not be practical during hours of darkness, in inclement weather or for those with mobility issues. Also, bus services are only

¹ Including: APP/K0235/W/24/3349671; APP/W0530/W/24/3352408; APP/F2415/W/24/3340441; APP/F2415/W/24/3340449; APP/K0235/W/25/3360479 and APP/J1860/W/24/3354156

said to operate at limited times and on three days per week, thereby limiting the ability for buses to meet day to day needs for travel from this site.

23. The appellant refers to the Government's intention to amend the Framework such that developments near railway stations should be permitted by default. Nonetheless, national policy has not been published to that effect and consultation on a revised Framework holds limited weight.
24. The appellant refers to a number of other appeal decisions in which a lack of street lighting did not prevent Inspectors from finding that the location of those proposals in rural areas to be acceptable. However, full details of those decisions and the site specific circumstances are not before me to make a meaningful comparison. I note that there is said to be an absence of recorded incidents on local roads. Also that the Council's highways officer acknowledged that the sustainability concerns need to be balanced with the need for rural housing. Also, there is inevitably variation in access to services and facilities between urban and rural areas and this needs to be taken into account in decision making.
25. Nevertheless, in the particular circumstances of this case I find that the absence of local facilities, combined with the constraints to walking routes from the appeal site would mean that future occupants would be most likely to travel by private car. Therefore, the location of the appeal site would not be acceptable with regard to its access to services and facilities by sustainable transport modes.
26. Accordingly, the proposal would conflict with Policies CP2, CP3, CP12, DM21, DM33 and DM44 of the LP. Amongst other matters, these generally seek to ensure housing proposals are located on sites where goods and services are accessible by a range of sustainable transport modes.

Other Matters

Archaeology

27. The Council in their reasons for refusal raised concerns about the potential for the proposal to impact on two scheduled monuments² located close to the appeal site, including in light of the potential for associated archaeological remains to be present within the appeal site. I also note reference to this in the response from Historic England. The Council also refers to the potential for archaeological remains on the appeal site associated with the former Saunderton Mill. A geophysical survey is said to have been undertaken but has not been submitted by the appellant.
28. Scheduled monuments are assets of the highest significance. The Framework advises that substantial harm or loss of such assets should be wholly exceptional. Nonetheless, even in the event of the appeal being allowed, planning permission would not be granted until such time as technical details consent had also been approved. Therefore, given the technical nature of the evidence needed to assess the potential for the proposal to impact on archaeological remains, I consider it is appropriate for this to fall to technical details consent stage. Furthermore, the PPG³ advises that technical details consent is to be decided in accordance with relevant policies in the development plan unless there are material considerations

² Roman Villa 140m east of St Mary and St Nicholas Church; and Moated site and associated medieval remains 430m north of Church Farm

³ PPG Ref: Paragraph: 015 Reference ID: 58-015-20170728

that indicate otherwise. Consequently, there is no requirement for consent to be granted at that stage in the event of harm to the scheduled monuments or their setting being identified.

Housing land supply

29. The Council advised that it can currently only demonstrate a 1.98 year housing land supply. As a consequence, policies that are most important for determining the proposal are out of date based on Framework paragraph 11(d) and footnote 8. However, I have found that the harm to a designated heritage asset would not be outweighed by the public benefits. Having regard to Framework paragraph 11(d)(i) and footnote 7, this provides a clear reason for refusing the proposal. Therefore, the presumption in favour of sustainable development would not apply. The proposal would be contrary to the development plan which indicates that planning permission should not be granted.

Conclusion

30. For the reasons set out above, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Rachel Hall

INSPECTOR