
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 February 2026

by **S Simms BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6th March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/E2205/W/25/3375669

Land north of Smarden Road, Pluckley, Kent TN27 0RE

- 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 Mills against the decision of Ashford Borough Council.
 - The application reference is PA/2025/1092.
 - The development proposed is residential development for up to six dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and permission in principle is granted.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal is for permission in principle. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that this is part of an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development, comprising two stages: the first 'permission in principle' (PIP) stage establishes whether a site is suitable in principle and the second 'technical details consent' (TDC) stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these two stages.
3. The scope of the considerations for PIP is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted. All other matters, including biodiversity net gain and any infrastructure contributions, would be considered as part of a subsequent TDC application if PIP is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.
4. The address on the decision notice differs from that on the application form. As I have no evidence that the change was agreed, I have used that on the form.
5. The application includes an Illustrative Design Pack, which demonstrates ways the site might be developed. I have treated this information as illustrative only.

Background and Main Issue

6. Issues such as the effect on biodiversity, including local wildlife sites, and the setting of the listed building would be considered as part of the TDC stage.
7. Whilst the proposed land use could be a factor capable of causing an adverse impact on protected species at the Local Wildlife Site, it need not be. Should it transpire that the proposals advanced at TDC stage had such an impact, it would be open to the Council to refuse TDC on that basis.
8. Similarly, whilst I have considered the characteristics of the appeal site, I am not persuaded that the proposed land use or amount of development must in principle

lead to unacceptable harm to the setting of the listed building. It would be open to the Council to refuse TDC for proposals that did so.

9. The main issue is whether the site is suitable for development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development.

Reasons

10. The site is located adjacent to Pluckley Thorne, which is part of the dispersed settlement of Pluckley. It has no facilities other than bus stops with one service a day to and from Ashford and one to and from St Michaels. The adjacent road lacks footways, which begin at the junction with Lambden Road just to the north.
11. The centre of Pluckley is about a kilometre further north along that road, which has a 30mph speed limit. It has a primary school, convenience store with post office, butcher, pub, church, pavilion, playing fields and tennis courts. A village hall and railway station are about 800m and 1.75km from the site respectively.
12. Consequently, basic facilities are just within walking distance of the site and easily within cycling distance. Furthermore, a frequent rail service is within a half-hour walk or ten-minute cycle ride. The site is therefore suitable for the proposed development, having regard to its accessibility to services and facilities.
13. The site is bounded to the north-west by Smarden Bell Road and to the south-east by Smarden Road. Trees and hedgerows line both roads, limiting visibility of the site other than from beyond the narrower, slightly more open south-west. A large two-storey timber-clad building stands just outside the site about halfway along the boundary near to Smarden Bell Road. To the north-east is the garden of Thorne House, a grade II listed building, which is visible from within the site.
14. The proposal would erect domestic buildings on mostly open land previously used for agriculture or camping. It would do so on a site that is relatively well screened from the wider countryside and bounded by some built form on or adjacent to the site. Given the proposed amount of development, I am satisfied its scale, layout and appearance, which would be dealt with at TDC stage, could avoid harm to the character and appearance of the site and its rural surroundings.
15. Consequently, the proposed development complies with Policies SP1, HOU5 and ENV3a of the Ashford Local Plan 2030, which focus development at sustainable locations, allow development adjacent to Pluckley, ensure it is proportionate to the size of the settlement and seek to protect landscape character.
16. Policy SP6 of the Ashford Local Plan 2030 and Policies H1 and H2 of the Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan Review 2023 provide for windfall housing development within the parish and set standards on design, sustainability and lighting that would be addressed at TDC stage. Consequently, I find no conflict with these policies.

Other Matters

17. The last use of the site for camping and its present state, which I observed during my site visit, mean that it is not previously developed land. Whilst the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) encourages as much use as possible of such land to accommodate needs, I am not aware of other such land that should be developed in preference or whose development would be prejudiced by that of the appeal site. This matter is therefore neutral in the balance.

18. The Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land. A figure of 4.39 years is cited by the appellant and not disputed by the Council. Interested parties consider the shortfall small and paragraph 11 d) of the Framework not to apply because the proposal would affect the setting of a listed building. However, the shortfall is sufficient and a strong reason for refusing because of any effect on the listed building is not provided at this PIP stage.
19. The Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan became part of the development plan less than five years before the date of this decision and does not allocate the site. It meets its housing requirement by way of a windfall policy. I am not persuaded that the proposal could not comply with that policy. In any event, PPG¹ is clear that such a policy alone is not sufficient to demonstrate that a conflict with a neighbourhood plan would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
20. Paragraphs 110 and 115 of the Framework manage patterns of growth to limit the need to travel and prioritise sustainable transport. Paragraph 129 seeks densities that use land efficiently and maintain character and setting. Paragraphs 135 and 139 seek good design. I have found that the site would be accessible and that the amount of development need not harm its character or appearance or that of its rural surroundings. Good design could be secured at the TDC stage.
21. Six windfall dwellings would contribute to addressing the shortage of housing land with accompanying local economic benefits. Because TDC would still be required, I cannot be sure these benefits would be realised. Nonetheless, the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies and the adverse impacts of granting permission in principle would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole.

Conclusion

22. For the above reasons, the proposal would comply with the development plan and I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

S Simms

INSPECTOR

¹ Paragraph: 097 Reference ID: 41-097-20190509