

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 March 2026

by J E Jolly BA (Hons) MA MSc MCIH MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26th March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/W/25/3376374

Land at Chapel Fields, Loxwood Road, Alfold, Cranleigh, GU6 8HA

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission in principle.
- The appeal is made by Mr Richard Cooke (Chapel Field Ltd) against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
- The application Ref is PIP/2025/01682
- The development proposed is for permission in principle for up to two dwellings.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. For clarity and certainty, I have used the description of development given on the Council's decision notice.
3. Planning Practice Guidance (the PPG) advises that permission in principle 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 which 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 on this basis.

Main Issue

4. The main issue in this appeal is whether the site is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development.

Reasons

Location

5. The appeal site is located adjacent to the CA to the northern side of the settlement of Alfold, which is predominantly typified by traditional style dwellings and spacious built form set on ample verdant plots. Chapel Fields is a contemporary residential development set around a cul-de sac with a community café/shop to the front that has an office and meeting space above. There is also a central play area, village parking spaces and a grassed open space area that was permitted by the Council as an 8 dwelling, mixed use scheme.¹

¹ WA/2018/0977

6. The proposed development is to construct up to two dwellings on the open space in similar materials to the other dwellings in Chapel Fields. The development would be approximately 100m outside the recognised settlement boundary of Alford beyond the Green Belt and therefore, for planning purposes, located in the countryside.
7. However, given the adjacent residential development, the Council concede that the proposal would be in a suitable location. Indeed, it is likely that the occupiers of the proposed dwellings would access the local shops and services, the church and local post office in the same way as the occupiers of the neighbouring dwellings.
8. Therefore, while mindful that Policy SP2 of the Waverley Local Plan Part 1 (2018) (WLP1) seeks to allow limited levels of development in and around Alford, I conclude that the proposal would be in a suitable location.

Land use

9. The appellant contends while the Council found that the proposal would result in 'less than substantial harm' to the setting of the CA, albeit at the lower end, that the character and appearance of the CA in Alford has changed over time.
10. As such, the appellant argues the more recent developments that can be seen in and around Alford demonstrate that the settlement is no longer simply an historic village surrounded by spacious rural farmland. Moreover, due to the hedges and trees which line the site and the café that faces the highway, that the development would only be glimpsed from within the CA along Loxwood Road.
11. I concur that views to the site are limited, and that the extent of a heritage asset's setting is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. However, the open space that is lined with hedges and trees to the northern side of Chapel Fields helps to provide some spatial relief in this location. Consequently, while relatively modest in extent, the space helps to soften the hard lines of the built form in Chapel Fields in a way that the proposed intensified scheme with a smaller open space would not.
12. The grassed, tree and hedge-lined space also creates a natural buffer between the new dwellings and the wider village of Alford, which is largely typified by spacious built form set on ample verdant plots adjacent to the nearby agricultural type fields. These matters were important to the Council in relation to the acceptability of the existing built form in Chapel Fields, particularly in relationship to the CA.
13. Furthermore, even though the existing and proposed dwellings would have ample private gardens, the pleasant green open space on the locally well-received scheme, is unlikely to be surplus to requirements or be replaced with an equivalent or better provision as required by Policy LRC1 of the WLP1.
14. Therefore, in this specific location, to my mind, the encircling proposal would intensify and urbanise the built form in this location. This would erode the verdant spaciousness of the appeal site and the immediate CA.
15. Overall, I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the CA and concur with the Council that the scheme would result in 'less than substantial harm' to the character and appearance of the area, albeit at the lower end.

Amount of development

16. The existing development for 8 dwellings with an open space was permitted following a number of schemes² that amongst other things were refused by the Council for the quantum of dwellings proposed for the land at Chapel Fields. Nevertheless, the proposal is for up to two additional dwellings of a similar design to the surrounding built form that would be constructed on most of the existing open space. The appellant argues that the two dwelling scheme would 'tighten' and encircle an otherwise 'loose' and unfinished spatial arrangement around the central play area. However, even though the number of new dwellings would be relatively limited and an 'Eco Garden' created to the side of the 2 properties in lieu of the existing space, the fact remains that the remaining open space would not be sufficient to provide a 'village green' type arrangement on the site as the appellant suggests.
17. Therefore, I conclude that the amount of development would diminish the veracity and purpose of the original development, which included a generous open space for community benefit.
18. Overall, while the location would be acceptable, as the increased quantum of dwellings would harm the character and appearance of the CA and erode the existing open space, and as there are no exceptional circumstances before me in support of the proposal, I conclude that the proposed development would not be an appropriate use of the land.
19. It follows then, that the proposal would be contrary to Policies RE1, LRC1, TD1 and HA1 of the WLP1, Policy DM20 of the Waverley Local Plan Part 2 (2023), as supported by Policies ANP1, ANP2, ANP5, ANP7 and ANP9 of the Alfold Neighbourhood Plan (2017–2032) which say, amongst other things, that the Council will seek to retain, enhance and increase the quantity and quality of open space, leisure and recreation facilities, and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) when read as a whole.

Other Matters

20. In support of his case, the appellant argues that the occupiers of the proposal would increase the profitability of the café, which in turn would help to manage and maintain the communal spaces within Chapel Fields.
21. At the site inspection I observed that the café/shop is already well used. Therefore, it is very likely during warmer times of the year that the open space will be used for, but not limited to, the purpose of biodiversity opportunities, unstructured play and an open-air space for larger social gatherings of all age groups from the immediate and surrounding community; some of which are likely to patronise the café that would help to support its long-term viability.
22. In comparison, the increase in the quantum of development in this location would erode the open space and therefore, would be likely to negate the range of community activities possible on the site, and hence reduce the level of income associated with the use of the existing open space.
23. Therefore, while the appellant's comments in this respect are noted, I find to the contrary.

² WA/2015/0404, WA/2020/1418, WA/2015/0404, WA/2014/0685, WA/2013/1744 and WA/1988/0638

Heritage and Planning Balance

24. Paragraph 212 of the Framework states that great weight should be given to a heritage asset's conservation. I have found that the proposed development would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area, including the CA. In accordance with the Framework, I am required to assess the extent of such harm. I have found that the harm to the CA would be 'less than substantial', albeit at the lower end. Where a development proposal will lead to 'less than substantial harm' to the significance of designated heritage assets, Paragraph 214 of the Framework is clear that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
25. In addition, the Council cannot demonstrate a 5-year Housing Land Supply (HLS). As such, Paragraph 11(d) of the Framework is therefore of relevance and the 'tilted balance' engaged. Therefore, any adverse impacts of the proposal need to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.
26. The economic benefits of the proposal include the construction work associated with the scheme and the use of local services by future occupiers. However, as the construction work would be short-term, the use of local services relatively small scale, and additional financial resources limited to the profitability of the two houses and use of the café, I give these combined benefits limited weight.
27. There would also be some environmental benefits related to the proposed 'Eco Garden' and landscaping. However, as some of these benefits would be normal planning requirements, I afford this minimal weight.
28. In respect of the social benefits related to the proposal, the Framework is clear that Government objectives include an emphasis on housing delivery with the aim of exceeding national housing targets. Paragraph 73 of the Framework also recognises that small sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area. However, as the scheme would provide a relatively low contribution to the Council's overall HLS, I attribute the social benefits little weight.
29. Therefore, given my findings on the main issues above, I conclude, even when considered in combination, the economic, environmental and social benefits of the residential scheme do not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the harm I have found, including the 'less than substantial harm' at the lower end to the setting of the CA

Conclusion

30. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

J E Jolly

INSPECTOR