



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 March 2026

by G Bayliss BA (Hons) MA MA MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27th March 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/K0235/W/25/3373602

Land at Wood Lane (to rear of Rose Meda, 42 Sandy Road), Willington, Bedford MK44 3QS

- 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 Miss Stacey Watson against the decision of Bedford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/01256/PIP.
 - The development proposed is for Permission in Principle for the erection of up to 1 self-build dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the description of development from the Council's decision notice as it best reflects the scheme that was subject to the Council's decision.
3. The Planning Practice Guidance 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) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle, and the second stage (technical details consent) is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these 2 stages.
4. 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.
5. No plans of the dwellings are required at permission in principle stage. Nevertheless, an illustrative block plan, elevation drawings and floor plans have been submitted. These demonstrate how the site could be developed and I have considered them as indicative only.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are:
 - Whether or not the proposal would be in an acceptable location for residential development having regard to the spatial strategy for the area and access to services and facilities; and
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area.

Reasons

Location

7. The appeal site relates to part of a long, linear plot of land which the Council suggest is residential garden land associated with 42 Sandy Road (No.42), a dwelling sited close to and accessed from Sandy Road. The long plot which is mainly grassy and divided up by several fences and gates extends down to Wood Lane where there is a secondary access. The appeal site relates to this lower portion of the plot.
8. Wood Lane is a mainly rural track which leads to a farm, with sporadic isolated dwellings and other built form located along it, mixed with paddocks and fields. It becomes increasingly rural in character moving away from the settlement and at the location of the appeal site the lane is flanked by large agricultural fields. These agricultural fields run alongside the garden land of No.42. On the opposite side of this garden land, towards the settlement, are several other mainly linear grassy plots with some large mature trees, before reaching a relatively new residential development on the edge of the built-up area, enclosed by Sandy Road and Wood Lane. This development of up to 50 dwellings was permitted under the Willington Neighbourhood Plan (2022) (WNP) and has a vehicular access onto Sandy Road with a pedestrian access onto Wood Lane.
9. The spatial strategy in the Bedford Borough Local Plan (2020) (BBLP) seeks to guide residential development towards established settlements with development boundaries that can offer some or all of the services and facilities required to support a residential use. The main built-up part of Willington is located to the north and west of the appeal site and the settlement policy area boundary (SPA) is approximately several plot widths away, defined by the perimeter of the above housing site.
10. Whilst both parties agree that the appeal proposal would not comply with the main types of development appropriate in the countryside as set out in BBLP Policy 7S, the appellant suggests that it would meet the exception which supports sites well related to the SPA and satisfies the relevant additional criteria (vi-x) related to this. These include responding to an identified community need with appropriate community support, and appropriate in scale, character and size to the settlement. The WNP also contains a series of objectives, including requiring housing to be appropriate in scale and within or adjacent to the settlement boundary. WNP Policy W1 sets out that the SPA is intended to shape the physical growth of the village over the plan period.
11. Firstly, therefore, an assessment must be made as to whether the appeal proposal is well related to the SPA. Based on the submitted evidence and from my assessment on site I find that the appeal site is some distance from the SPA and the intervening tranche of paddocks and garden land represent a clear and distinct break from this boundary. Even though the appeal site forms part of a residential plot, it does not follow that this makes it automatically suitable for additional housing land. In this case, I could see that the part towards Wood Lane had a much more rural character and its naturalised landscape was similar to the surrounding paddocks and fields. In contrast the part closer to the dwelling, a considerable distance away, was more urban in character with buildings and hardstanding. From the appeal site, I could see views through to the new housing

development, but again that development had a closer physical and visual affinity with development along Sandy Road rather than Wood Lane. Therefore, I found that the appeal site had a distinctly rural feel which assimilated with the more naturalised landscape around it and the extensive agricultural fields beyond.

12. I saw other dwellings accessed from Wood Lane, including some beyond the appeal site, and further away from the settlement, but given their typically sporadic locations and the intervening landscape this did not suggest to me that the appeal site should be regarded as being well related to the main settlement. Therefore, I find that the appeal site is not well related to the SPA, consequently, criteria vi-x are not applicable, and the appeal proposal would be contrary to the BBLP spatial strategy and the WNP.
13. Given the proximity of the appeal site to Willington and the presence of nearby dwellings, the site does not appear to be isolated in the context of paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). It also has the potential to support nearby local services and facilities in accordance with paragraph 83.
14. Nevertheless, the appeal site is clearly in a rural setting and is physically and visually divorced from the main body of the settlement. Wood Lane is a single-track road, and I saw no continuous streetlighting or pavements between the appeal site and the settlement. Whilst the road appeared quiet and tranquil with wide grassy verges, these conditions may deter many residents, especially those with young children or those with mobility problems, from walking into Willington to access facilities and services especially in periods of bad weather and darkness. There are some existing residential properties along Wood Lane which suggest that the road may provide safe access for people not in cars, including the pedestrian access from the new residential development, but generally many of these properties are closer to the settlement and residents would travel less distance on this road. Even though there are dwellings beyond the appeal site this does not override the concerns raised.
15. The Council suggest that the nearest bus stops are beyond the generally accepted 400m cut off point for walking. Also, although there is a nearby garden centre which I saw offering some general provisions, other shops, including the post office, are some distance further. The local school is also considered by the Council to be beyond the generally accepted walkable distance to school. Although the appellant contends that these distances are within walkable thresholds, in my view, from what I saw, given the distances involved and the nature of the road, the appeal site is not in a sustainable location, and future occupants would be mainly reliant on car journeys.
16. The appellant refers to an approved application for 2 dwellings (25/00247/PIP) which is suggested as being 200m along the same road and materially consistent to this appeal. The Council suggests that this site is adjacent to the SPA boundary and is therefore closer to local facilities and services. The appellant also references a site outside the SPA on 35 Sandy Road (19/00303/FUL) with permission for 3 dwellings. The Council comments that this site comprised previously developed land with bus stops within walking distance of that site.
17. In relation to both cases, few details have been provided to identify the exact circumstances surrounding these decisions including their planning histories. Therefore, it is not possible for me to establish whether these cases are

comparable, and I must rely on the particular facts of the appeal before me. There may be other housing sites in the pipeline demonstrating demand for development nearby, but each must be assessed on its merits according to the provisions of the development plan and Framework at the time.

18. I conclude that the proposal would not provide a suitable location for a dwelling having regard to the spatial strategy for the area and access to facilities and services. As such, the proposal would conflict with BBLP Policies 3S, 4S, 7S and 53, WNP Policy W1 and the Framework.

Character and appearance

19. Although the appeal site is regarded as being part of garden land associated with No.42, I have found that the part towards Wood Lane visually appears as a more naturalised landscape. I saw relatively rough grassland with shrubs and trees close to the perimeter and a visual integration with the surrounding grassy plots, trees and fields.
20. Wood Lane may have some development along its length, but I have found that much of this is concentrated towards the settlement and the further away from the centre the more sporadic and fragmented it becomes. So much so that close to the appeal site I saw little built form nearby and on the opposite side of Wood Lane there is a scattering of built form mainly embedded within their plots, away from the road frontage. Many of the buildings and dwellings along Wood Lane may have been present for many years, and some may be more remote than the appeal site, but that would not in itself justify further development which would incrementally erode the character and appearance of the countryside.
21. I recognise that the recent residential estate referred to above has encroached towards the appeal site and has had a more urbanising effect on the part of Wood Lane closer to the settlement. However, I saw on site that this wedge-shaped development presents less of a frontage to Wood Lane and there is a sizable area of existing mature trees and open, grassy land between this development and the appeal site. Consequently, the appeal site retains its more remote and rural feel.
22. All in all, taking account of the characteristics of the site and its surrounding context, including the rural road, with its wide verges and surrounding vegetation, the character and appearance of the appeal site is distinctly rural and feels part of the wider countryside.
23. The erection of a dwelling on the appeal site, including associated domestic paraphernalia, in whatever design or form, would significantly and permanently change the existing character and appearance of the site. It would introduce built form where there is currently none and the totality of the development would erode the contribution that the site makes to the wider rural context and intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The indicative plans suggesting a dwelling occupying the full width of the plot and a significant built form, together with hardstanding and parking to the frontage indicates to me just how urbanising that dwelling could appear. As an isolated dwelling it would be distinctly out of place, remote and detached from nearby built form.
24. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area. This would be contrary to BBLP Policies 28S, 29, 30 and 7S, and WNP Policy W1A. These

policies, amongst other things, seek to ensure that development contributes positively to the area's character and identity. It would also conflict with the Framework which requires development to be sympathetic to local character.

Planning balance

25. The Council accepts that it does not currently have a Framework compliant housing land supply, with the Council suggesting that this is in the region of 3.35 years, a figure not contested by the appellant. This is a fairly substantial shortfall. Paragraph 11 of the Framework states that in these circumstances relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up to date. However, this does not mean that they are afforded no weight. The need to carefully manage and limit the number of new homes in locations with limited sustainability credentials, and to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside remains valid in the context of the environmental objectives of national and local planning policy. As such, I still afford the harm arising from the conflict with these local plan policies significant weight.
26. The undersupply triggers the presumption in favour of development as set out in paragraph 11d) of the Framework. This indicates that permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.
27. Framework Paragraph 14 is also relevant in the planning balance which notes that any conflicts with the neighbourhood plan are likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits if a) the neighbourhood plan is less than 5 years old before the date on which the decision is made and b) the neighbourhood plan identifies sites to meet its identified housing requirement. The Council considers that the WNP complies with both a) and b) of Paragraph 14 and is engaged in the determination of this appeal. I have little reason to consider otherwise.
28. The development would provide one dwelling which would add to the overall stock and choice of residential dwellings and support the supply of homes. A boost to housing supply is an important Framework consideration in favour of the development, especially given the level of housing land supply. The development plan and Framework also recognise the important contribution that small and windfall sites can make towards meeting the housing requirement in an area. It would also appear to make effective use of the land.
29. The proposal is described as a 'self-build dwelling' and on this point the Framework recognises the need to provide housing for different groups of people including those wishing to commission and build their own homes. A self-build dwelling has the potential to make a limited but important contribution to the housing mix and need for such plots in the area. On this point the appellant considers that the Council is not meeting its statutory duty under the Self Build and Custom House Building Act 2015, and the Council agrees that it has a deficit within the borough. The Council also confirms that even at this Permission in Principle stage, it is satisfied that granting this application would not allow for the construction of any other housing types.

30. There would be some social and economic benefits during construction and occupation, and it would contribute to the vitality of local services. However, considering all these benefits, given the size of the development proposed, these benefits would be modest in scale, and I attribute them limited weight.
31. In terms of adverse impacts, the proposal has failed to demonstrate that the site is in a sustainable location from which to access nearby services and facilities. The nature of the access road and the distance to most facilities would favour car journeys. The proposal does not demonstrate that these matters can be mitigated satisfactorily. I have also found that the appeal proposal would conflict with the Council's spatial strategy, and I must give significant weight to the conflict with the locational strategy of the WNP, by virtue of Framework Paragraph 14. I have also concluded that the scheme would cause permanent harm to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area. These matters weigh heavily against the scheme.
32. Therefore, in the planning balance, there are identified harms which significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

Conclusion

33. For the above reasons, and having taken all other matters raised into account, there are no material considerations that indicate that the proposal should be determined otherwise than in accordance with the development plan. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

G Bayliss

INSPECTOR