



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 17 May 2021

by M Bale BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 May 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/21/3268810

Voscombe Farm, New Road, Bourton SP8 5BX

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Greystoke Land against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref 2/2020/0613/OUT, dated 1 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 25 November 2020.
 - The development proposed is 10 no. residential units.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural and Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal form indicates that the description of development changed from that on the application form. While there is no change as to the extent of development proposed, it is not clear whether the change of description was agreed, so I have used that from the application form in my heading.
3. The appeal relates to an application for outline planning permission. Approval is sought for access, layout and scale at this stage. As such, I have treated the proposed site plan, which shows the access, arrangement of dwellings, number of storeys and internal site layout as a firm part of the proposal.
4. The Council has confirmed that a reason for refusal regarding drainage has been addressed by the appellant's evidence.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are the effect on the character and appearance of the area and whether the proposal should make a contribution to affordable housing provision.

Reasons

Character and appearance

6. The site is located at the edge of Bourton, which the design and access statement describes as a broadly linear settlement that has evolved from an amalgamation of a number of small hamlets. The land around the site generally falls away from the settlement edge providing wide ranging panoramic views across the surrounding countryside.
7. The Bourton Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031 (NP) identifies various important views around the settlement. One such view is across the appeal site, although it is far from clear what is important about the view since it appears to be

partially obscured by a roadside hedge and a metal barn at the site. Nevertheless, the view that is available is of the attractive rising topography that encloses this part of Bourton and contributes to the overall appearance of the settlement's landscape setting.

8. The proposed development would partially block the identified important view, but it would also result in the removal of the barn and opening up of a similar view alongside the new dwellings where the barn now stands. In effect, the identified important view would be recreated marginally further along the road in a manner that would allow its continued contribution to the landscape setting of Bourton. New buildings would also be sited to the edge of the wide panorama over the falling landscape, which would not be harmed.
9. I, therefore, find that the development would not have a significant adverse effect on important views of the countryside, which is one of the aims of NP Policy 1. Accordingly, effects on the landscape would be principally limited to the loss of the existing undeveloped field and any harm associated with that would be very limited given the settlement edge location.
10. However, houses along New Road are generally arranged in a linear form with a positive frontage relationship to the main road through the settlement. A cluster of dwellings around Woolcott Lane are set back, but the nature of the access lane and arrangement of dwellings gives a distinctly informal rural appearance separate to the road frontage. There are also some exceptions such as at Old Pound Court, but that more modern cul-de-sac of housing is largely hidden from the public realm, being accessed between dwellings on the road frontage and otherwise set back behind substantial landscaping. It is also surrounded by other development where its regimented form is relatively inconspicuous.
11. By contrast, the appeal site would be beyond the edge of the existing settlement where surrounding housing is fairly loosely arranged, giving way to the open and sporadically developed countryside beyond. In this location, a formal cul-de-sac of housing would sit awkwardly and, forming the approach to the settlement, would detract from its overall character which integrates well into its strong landscaping setting.
12. The design and access statement explains how the proposal seeks to create a farmstead style development, with buildings arranged around a courtyard. I can see from the illustrative material that buildings could be designed with relatively plain facades, with scales and floor levels that could reflect historic agricultural buildings that may have been built on an ad-hoc basis as required. However, this is not clearly borne out by the detailed site plan, for which approval is now sought for access and layout.
13. While a shared surface access is shown, the dwellings would sit around a formal estate road with clearly defined parking bays and a turning head. Along with the formal garden arrangements, the plan shows a development more akin to a typical suburban cul-de-sac of housing accessed from a landscaped driveway than a farmstead. Furthermore, 4 of the dwellings would, uncharacteristically, firmly turn their back on New Road such that the domestic style access dominated the approach to the settlement.
14. While I understand that the development seeks to strike a balance between typically low-density edge-of-settlement housing and an efficient use of land, I,

therefore, find that rather than making a sensitive transition between Bourton and the countryside, the proposal would harm the soft landscape setting of the settlement to the detriment of its overall character and appearance. This would result in a conflict with those aims of Policy 24 of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031 (LP) and NP Policies 1, 2 and 3 that seek to ensure that development should be designed to improve the character and quality of the area within which it is located, make a sensitive transition between village and countryside, have regard to the spatial characteristics of the locality, and reinforce the underlying vernacular or character of its context.

Affordable Housing

15. LP Policy 8 requires development that delivers eleven or more net additional dwellings and which has a maximum combined gross floorspace of more than 1000 square metres to contribute to the provision of affordable housing. The proposal would deliver 10 additional dwellings and so would not conflict with this policy.
16. The more recent National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) indicates that provision of affordable housing should not be sought for residential developments that are not major developments, which is 10 units or more. However, that is not to say that developments of 10 units should provide affordable housing and so the Framework does not indicate that a different threshold to that set out in the development plan should be applied.
17. I, therefore, find that the proposal would comply with the development plan in respect of affordable housing provision and no harm would arise from its omission.

Other Matters

18. The evidence indicates that the Council can, at best, demonstrate a 4.19 year supply of housing land. The appellant has set out that, if considered against the housing requirement of the LP, the supply would be less and that this demonstrates that the policies of the development plan have been ineffective in meeting housing needs. While this site is outside the defined settlement boundary, Bourton is identified in the LP as a suitable location for housing. Given this and the housing land supply situation, I attribute limited weight to the conflict with those LP and NP policies that seek to resist development beyond that boundary.
19. Moreover, in this context the benefits associated with the supply of housing including short and long-term economic benefits, the creation of jobs and the like, collectively receive substantial weight. Biodiversity enhancement could also be secured, which would be of limited positive weight.
20. The housing land supply situation also means that Framework Paragraph 11(d) falls to be considered. This indicates that permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when considered against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole.
21. I have found that there would be very little harm to landscape character and important views of the countryside. However, the proposed site layout would lead to an incongruous development that did not provide a sensitive transition between settlement and countryside. It would permanently harm the approach

to Bourton creating an uncharacteristic suburban fringe that diluted the character of the settlement.

22. The Framework seeks to boost significantly the supply of housing and recognises the importance of small sites in doing so, but it seeks to do this while maintaining a strong sense of place, being sympathetic to local character. Despite the substantial benefits, I find that the adverse impacts of this proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits considered against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole. Therefore, the proposal does not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in Framework Paragraph 11.

Conclusion

23. The harm to the character and appearance of the area results in a conflict with the development plan, read as a whole. For the reasons given, material considerations, including the substantial benefits that would result, do not indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with the development plan.
24. I, therefore, conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

M Bale

INSPECTOR