

28th July 2017

Appeal Statement

LAND AT KYDERMINSTER ROAD WINCHCOMBE

PLANNING INSPECTORATE REF APP/G1630/W/17/3171926

APPLICATION NO 16/00481/OUT

OUTLINE APPLICATION FOR THE ERECTION OF UP TO 35 DWELLINGS, VEHICULAR ACCESS FROM CLARENDON ROAD AND WHITMORE ROAD, TOGETHER WITH PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AND OTHER ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE

This statement sets out CPRE's objections to the proposed development. It takes account of the documents submitted at the planning application stage, adopted and emerging development plan documents, and national guidance and policy.

The Site and its Surroundings

The market town of Winchcombe lies on the edge of the Cotswolds AONB. The historic core of the town and land to the west and southwest is within the AONB. Part of the town to the north and north-east is outside the designated area.

The proposed site for development is on the northwest edge of the town, outside but adjoining the settlement boundary. It is within the Cotswolds AONB on rising ground towards Langley Hill.

In CPRE's view, in the context of Winchcombe and its setting, this development should be regarded as major development in terms of Sections 115 and 116 of the NPPF and the issue is whether exceptional circumstances exist which would justify this scale of development in the Cotswolds AONB.

Development Plans

The NPPF (para 2) makes it clear that applications for development must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The statutory development plan for Winchcombe consists of the Tewkesbury Borough Local Plan to 2011 adopted in 2006, and the Winchcombe and Sudeley Neighbourhood Plan which came into legal force on 24th January 2017.

The area will, hopefully, before the end of the year be covered by the Joint Core Strategy (the JCS) for Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury which is in the final stages of examination with hearings on main modifications to the strategy taking place between 11th

and 21st July 2017. Given the late stage in plan preparation, considerable weight should be placed on the policies in the emerging Strategy.

Tewkesbury Borough Local Plan to 2011

While much of the Local Plan to 2011 is out of date, a number of policies have been “saved” and are relevant to this appeal. Policy for larger settlements, which includes Winchcombe, is covered under Policy HOU2. Such areas are defined by a residential development boundary. Policy HOU4 applies outside the development boundary and restricts new housing development. As a saved policy, it still carries weight and the proposed development does not comply with it.

Winchcombe and Sudeley Neighbourhood Plan

The introduction to the Plan states that it “provides for modest, incremental development and investment in the town and surrounding area over the next fifteen years or so. The words “modest” and “incremental” are important, given that the whole area of the Plan is either adjacent to or within the nationally important Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty landscape setting, in which there is a presumption against “major” development.

In the light of the modest requirements for further housing during the neighbourhood plan period (to 2031) (see below) and a landscape assessment which indicated that further developments on the scale of recent major estates in Winchcombe would not fit well with landscape and environmental constraints, the Neighbourhood Plan policy is to support well designed infilling within the built up area, including provision for affordable housing and single storey buildings for older people wishing to continue to live independently.

Emerging JCS

In relation to new housing in Winchcombe, the emerging JCS says that to meet the needs of Tewkesbury Borough, outside of the urban extensions to Gloucester and Cheltenham, the JCS will make provision for at least 9,899 new homes. At least 7,445 dwellings will be provided through existing commitments, development at Tewkesbury Town in line with its role as a market town, smaller-scale development meeting local needs at Rural Service Centres and Service Villages, and sites covered by any Memoranda of Agreement.

Rural Service Centres and Service Villages will accommodate lower levels of development to be allocated through the Tewkesbury Borough Plan and Neighbourhood Plans, proportional to their size and function, and also reflecting their proximity and accessibility to Cheltenham and Gloucester and taking into account the environmental, economic and social impacts. Over the plan period to 2031:

- The rural service centres will accommodate 1860 new homes, and
- The service villages will accommodate 880 new homes.

Two rural service centres are identified in the JCS – Bishop’s Cleeve and Winchcombe. We understand that the requirements have been allocated on a 67:33 proportional housing split

between Bishop's Cleeve and Winchcombe, and that as at September 2015 1,746 units had been committed (Bishop's Cleeve 1,494 and Winchcombe 252) leaving a balance of just 114 to be found up to 2031.

In relation to AONB policy, Policy SD8: The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) says

All development proposals in and within the setting of the Cotswolds AONB will be required to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance its landscape, scenic beauty, wildlife, cultural heritage and other special qualities. Proposals will be required to be consistent with the policies set out in the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan.

The NPPF, paragraph 115 says that "Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty." Paragraph 116 goes on to say that "Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except where it can be demonstrated that they are in the public interest". *Major development* is not defined and is a matter of judgement for the decision maker. CPRE considers that in the context of Winchcombe, the wishes of the community as expressed through the Neighbourhood Plan and the amount of local housing needed, a proposed development of 35 houses should be regarded as major development.

Housing Land Supply

For many years, going back to at least to the Homelands Farm/Cleevelands appeal decisions of July 2012, and probably before that, Tewkesbury Borough Council has been unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing. It can now do so, but not for the whole of the Borough. A representative of CPRE attended the second day of the Innsworth/Twigworth inquiry on 21st June, when housing land availability was discussed, and has examined the calculations set out in the Tewkesbury Borough Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement June 2017. Paragraph 1.1 of the Statement states that it "*sets out the position on the five-year housing supply for Tewkesbury Borough as of 1st April 2017*" [CPRE emphasis]. This is misleading, as it does not cover the whole Borough.

Our understanding of the current position is as follows. Taking the "demand" side of the equation first, the housing requirement figure of 9,899 dwellings (paragraph 3.1) is much less than the total number of dwellings which will be need to be built within the administrative area of Tewkesbury Borough in the JCS period. This is because the requirement figure excludes consideration of the strategic allocations in Tewkesbury Borough which are designed to meet needs arising from Gloucester and Cheltenham. Likewise, the supply side excludes these strategic allocations, although it is clear from the tables in the report that other major sites (e.g. at Longford and Brockworth) located close to the JCS strategic allocations do in fact form part of the supply. We understand that the basis for this approach is contained in paragraphs 52 to 54 of the JCS Inspector's Interim Report of May 2016.

Winchcombe lies in the part of the Borough the statement does cover. A supply figure of 6.06 years supply is identified which we consider appropriate, on the basis that all planning authorities have to provide a 5% buffer in accordance with paragraph 47 of the NPPF, and that Table 1 in the document shows that completions have more than matched requirements in the first six years (2011-2017) of the JCS period. It should also be noted that the deletion of the MoD site at Ashchurch from the JCS (because it is not now available) does not affect the five-year land supply, as this site was not expected to deliver housing until towards the end of the plan period.

Recent housing delivery in Winchcombe

The need for affordable housing in Winchcombe was assessed in 2012 (Winchcombe Town Housing Needs Report 2012). This determined a need for 40 affordable homes. We understand that need has been fulfilled with the Bloors and Redrow developments and at Mount View Drive.

Landscape Issues

Representatives of CPRE visited the site on 25th July 2017.

The proposed site is immediately outside the Winchcombe settlement boundary on rising ground on the lower slopes of Langley Hill. Langley Hill is identified in the Cotswolds Landscape Character Assessment (Cotswolds AONB Partnership 2004) as an Escarpment Outlier that “effectively defines the limits of the town.”

The 2014 Winchcombe Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Study undertaken as part of the neighbourhood planning process concluded that the visual impact of development in this area would be “moderate adverse.”

While development would remain below the critical 115m contour limiting its visibility and the outline plans include measures to soften the edge of the development, it would nevertheless create an extension of the built up area further into the AONB.

The current development edge in this part of Winchcombe is clear and logical. In CPRE’s view the development boundary should not be breached, extending development further into the AONB in this area.

We note the objections of the Cotswolds Conservation Board which said that “there is no priority at this point in time in relation to the provision of housing and affordable housing on this site, that would outweigh the harm from this development on the countryside of the AONB.”

Conclusions

We submit that in the context of Winchcombe, development of 35 houses within the Cotswolds AONB should be regarded as major development, and that exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated which would justify development on this scale.

Part of Winchcombe lies outside the AONB and it should be possible to meet Winchcombe's modest housing needs over the next few years primarily through infilling, as envisaged in the Winchcombe and Sudeley Neighbourhood Plan.

We submit that the proposal is in conflict with the policies in the recently made Winchcombe and Sudeley Neighbourhood Plan which should be accorded great weight.

Furthermore, with the Borough Council being able to meet a five year housing land supply requirement in his part of the Borough immediate housing needs are being addressed.

Accordingly, we argue that this appeal should be dismissed.