
Appeal Decision

Inquiry held on 4 & 5 August 2015

Site visit made on 6 August 2015

by Terry G Phillimore MA MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 15/09/2015

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/A/14/2229034

Land to the East of Broughton Road, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 4NS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by WCE Properties Ltd against the decision of Cheshire East Council.
 - The application Ref 13/5085N, dated 1 December 2013, was refused by notice dated 21 May 2014.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 124 dwelling houses, including 44 affordable units, with associated highways and open amenity space, landscaping and ecological protection zone.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the erection of 124 dwelling houses, including 38 affordable units, with associated highways and open amenity space, landscaping and ecological protection zone at Land to the East of Broughton Road, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 4NS in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 13/5085N, dated 1 December 2013, subject to the conditions set out in the attached Schedule.

Procedural Matters

2. The appellant is now trading in the name of Tesni Properties Ltd.
3. An agreement containing planning obligations pursuant to section 106 of the Act was submitted at the inquiry.
4. Amended plans have been prepared by the appellant during the appeal. These show a minor adjustment to the treatment of the access arrangements, and the introduction of 6 one-bedroom dwellings (in place of two-bedroom dwellings). There are also revised elevations showing some changes to detailed design including the addition of windows.
5. The original application description specified that 44 units would be affordable. The appellant wishes to reduce the number to 38 on the basis that this would meet the level of provision required under the development plan. The Council agrees with this, and is satisfied with this level of provision.
6. The above proposed amendments overcome the Council's reasons for refusal relating to affordable housing, highways and design. The changes were given publicity in advance of the inquiry. They do not alter the substance of the proposal, and are of a minor nature within the context of its overall scale and

content. No party has objected to the appeal being considered on the revised basis, and this is supported by the Council. I agree with the common ground position that no prejudice would arise from this. I proceed in that way, including by making a change to the description of the development to refer to 38 affordable units.

Main Issues

7. The main issues are:
- a) the implications of the local housing land position including with respect to the weight to be given to the five-year supply shortfall and the application of relevant development plan and national policies;
 - b) the effect the development would have on the character and appearance of the countryside location;
 - c) whether the proposal overall amounts to sustainable development.

Reasons

8. The 6.41ha site lies on the northern edge of the main built-up area of Crewe and is currently greenfield agricultural land. Under policy NE.2 of the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011 (adopted February 2005) it is within open countryside, being outside a settlement boundary. According to the policy, only certain types of development will be permitted within open countryside. Policy RES.5 on housing in the open countryside similarly restricts this to limited categories. The proposal for residential development of the site does not meet any of the exceptions, and is contrary to these policies. It is thereby not in accordance with the development plan because of the fundamental nature of this policy conflict, which would involve a substantial breach in view of the scale of the proposal. A finding in favour of the proposal is thus dependent on there being other material considerations to override the development plan. There is no dispute on this matter.
9. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 14 indicates that, for decision-taking, this means, where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission 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; or specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted.
10. The Framework sets out an aim in paragraph 47 to boost significantly the supply of housing. It requires that local planning authorities should use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in the Framework. They should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against their housing requirements, with an additional buffer of 5% (moved forward from later in the plan period) to ensure choice and competition in the market for land. The Framework indicates that the buffer should be increased to 20% where there has been a record of persistent under delivery of housing.

11. According to paragraph 49 of the Framework, relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. Policies NE.2 and RES.5 are agreed to be such policies on the basis of their potential effect of restraining housing development in broad geographical terms.
12. At the time of its refusal of the planning application the Council considered that it had a five-year housing land supply. This was on the basis of a housing requirement of 1,180 homes per year, being the calculation of Objectively Assessed Housing Need used in the Cheshire East Local Plan Submission Draft. Following initial examination sessions on the Plan, the examining Inspector in November 2014 expressed an interim view that this calculation of objectively assessed need was too low, and that based on 6 years of not meeting housing targets a 20% buffer should be applied.
13. The Cheshire East Housing Development Study 2015 was published in final form in June. This confirms a conclusion in an earlier draft version that the Objectively Assessed Need for Housing in Cheshire East is 36,000 dwellings over the period 2010-30, equating to an average of 1,800 dwellings per year. On the evidence this appears to be the current best estimate of the full objectively assessed need, with the Council no longer relying on the 1,180 figure.
14. At this level of need and applying a 20% buffer the Council now acknowledges that it is unable to identify a five-year supply of housing land. It describes the extent of the shortfall as "substantial" but does not put forward a specific estimate of what this is. The Council's most recent published Housing Land Supply Position Statement has a base date of 31 March 2014. It states that there is a total five-year land supply for 10,562 dwellings. Applying this to the 1,800 annual figure with additions for the backlog and buffer, the appellant calculates that it equates to a supply of 3.17 years. Based on a review of the contents of the Council's land supply projections, the appellant puts forward a lower figure of 8,957 dwellings as being deliverable. This results in a reduced calculation of 2.68 years for the supply.
15. Estimates of housing land supply require judgments to be made, and it can be expected that different practitioners will arrive at varying conclusions for a particular case. The position on sites in East Cheshire will have moved on since March 2014, with further permissions granted but also schemes being implemented. The Council did not attempt to engage in any detail with a quantification of the five-year supply at the inquiry, and the appellant's analysis was not challenged. Even on the appellant's higher figure the shortfall in the five-year supply equates to land for 6,099 units, rising to 7,704 units on the lower figure. Based on the available evidence it is clear that there is a very large shortfall, and that the requirement is a long way from being made up. This shortfall is a very significant material consideration and should be given substantial weight.
16. Having regard to paragraph 49 of the Framework, policies NE.2 and RES.5 are not up-to-date. While as saved policies they remain extant, the settlement boundaries through which they are applied were based on accommodating development needs up to 2011, the end date of the Plan. There is no dispute that, in order to provide for currently identified needs, it will be necessary to

allow development on land currently designated as countryside, therefore involving an 'in principle' conflict with these policies.

17. The supporting justification for policy NE.2 refers to previous Government guidance which sought to safeguard the countryside for its own sake. The Framework includes recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside as part of a key planning principle. Despite this change in wording, the Local Plan's restrictive approach to new development in the countryside is broadly consistent with the Framework's acknowledgement of the countryside's inherent qualities, which is not confined to valued landscapes. This policy objective continues to carry some weight. While the in principle conflict with policy NE.2 is therefore not in itself decisive, given the context of the shortfall in housing land, the degree of countryside harm remains a matter to consider in judging whether an exception to the development plan is warranted in this case. I now turn to that.

Character and appearance

18. The relatively flat site comprises two fields of unmanaged agricultural pasture land. It is bounded by open countryside to the north and east, with an agricultural field to the immediate south.
19. Broughton Road runs northwards out of the main part of Crewe. There is intermittent ribbon development along both sides. The site is on the east side, and part of it forms a gap in the developed frontage, such that its west boundary along this section abuts the road. The remainder of the west boundary runs at the rear of properties fronting the road.
20. In addition to the private views of the site from the neighbouring properties, it provides a limited vista of open agricultural countryside which is visible from the road. This is moderately attractive, with the typical features of open fields, hedgerows, trees, scrub and general absence of built form. The vista is notable as the first expansive view of open countryside when leaving Crewe on this route, therefore giving a positive visual perception of countryside in close proximity to the built-up area.
21. A footpath leads from Broughton Road along the southern edge of the site, joining a north-south footpath which runs along its eastern boundary. There are also some informal routes across the site itself, which appear to be used for example by dog-walkers. Views out of and across the site are limited by boundary vegetation, although this would be less so in winter. The nature of the site and its immediate surroundings give users of the paths a sense of a countryside setting with a degree of tranquillity, despite the nearby presence of housing. There are some views into the site from Waldron's Lane and Stoneley Road which lie to the east, although again restricted by vegetation.
22. The site has no specific landscape designation beyond that of countryside. While it is evident from third party representations that its current undeveloped nature is appreciated by local people, contributing to an experience of living close to the countryside, no attempt has been made to suggest that it carries the status of a valued landscape as referred to in the Framework.
23. The proposal would continue the line of frontage development on Broughton Road by the erection of houses on either side of an access link. There would be a looser pattern of development within the main part of the site,

incorporating significant areas of open space. The south-west quadrant of the site would remain undeveloped, with a new circular boardwalk footpath in this nature area. Most of the site's existing vegetation would be retained, and new planting would be added. Following the amendments contained in the revised plans, no criticism is made by the Council of the layout and design of the development, and I have no reason to take a different view on this. The scheme can be regarded as compliant with policy BE.1 on amenity and policy BE.2 on design standards.

24. With the development there would no longer be a view of countryside when looking towards the site from Broughton Road, in addition to the effect on private views. The public rights of way would be retained but the setting of these would change from that of along the edges of fields to one that is adjacent to a housing development. It is also likely that there would be some partly screened views of the new built form from Waldron's Lane and Stoneley Road.
25. However, these effects would amount to an essentially local impact. The site is relatively confined visually such that there are no obvious distant views of it, and the development would not be prominent in a wider landscape. Although the site is separated from other development by the field to the south, close by to the south-east work has commenced on an approved scheme at Coppenhall East comprising some 650 homes to be erected on open land south of Stoneley Road. It can therefore be anticipated that the area in general will become more urban.
26. The site has no particular distinction from the general characteristics of fields on the edge of the urban area that are developed for housing. In time it is likely that the development would become reasonably well assimilated in the setting, with the edge of the built-up area moved outwards. This conclusion is not to diminish the strong local feelings apparent at the inquiry that the development would result in an unwelcome change in the nature of the immediate surroundings of the existing housing, but has regard to the wider context of the proposal.
27. Overall I assess that the proposal would result in a moderate degree of harm to the character and appearance of the countryside location, with some limited erosion of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Sustainable development

28. The Framework sets out that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.
29. **As noted above, the provision of additional housing is in line with national planning policy, and is an economic and social benefit. This is an important positive aspect of the proposal, particularly with the serious shortfall in housing land supply and despite that the gain would only be a relatively small part of the total requirement. Specifically, the provision of a significant number of affordable dwellings (at some 30% of the units), secured by a planning obligation, is a matter that carries substantial weight given the evidence of pressing need for such housing.**
30. As well as this new housing, the development would bring a number of economic benefits that are undisputed by the Council, encompassing

investment and jobs and support for local facilities. These are also of social value. The benefits carry reasonable weight.

31. In environmental terms, a negative factor is that the proposal would involve development of a greenfield site rather than the reuse of land that has previously been developed, with some moderate harm to the character and appearance of the countryside. However, it is clear that accommodating housing needs in the Council's area will require the release of greenfield sites. The effect in this case is also mitigated by the fact that the site comprises poor quality agricultural land, so that the proposal would not result in the loss of any of the best and most versatile agricultural land. In addition, there is agreement that the site is sustainable in terms of its location on the northern edge of Crewe in an area that hosts a range of shops and local services.
32. Taking into account the above performance of the proposal on the three dimensions, overall on balance I consider it to amount to a sustainable development.

Obligations and Conditions

33. Jointly agreed evidence has been put forward to support the planning obligations in the submitted section 106 agreement. This evidence addresses the requirements of Regulations 122 and 123 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010, on the latter to show that relevant contributions limits would not be breached. Policy BE.5 provides for necessary infrastructure to be secured in association with development.
34. The provision of 38 units of affordable housing should be secured by obligation in order to accord with the 30% target of policy RES.7 and help meet the identified need for such accommodation. An alternative level of provision at 35% is included, but there is no policy basis to support this, so that it would not be necessary or reasonable.
35. Contributions towards education provision are required to meet needs that would be likely to arise from the development, with evidence of pressure on facilities and where locally the contributions would be spent. Open space provision should be secured on site to meet the needs of future occupiers, in accordance with policy RT.3. A biodiversity contribution is justified to secure nature conservation interests, in accordance with policy NE.5.
36. The development would generate additional traffic in the local area. The proposal was the subject of a detailed transport assessment. The local highway authority assesses that the development could be accommodated on the network in combination with other developments subject to provision of funding towards a number of specified local highway improvements. With this necessary provision, there is no evidence to indicate that the proposal would have a serious adverse effect on traffic flows in the vicinity. A travel plan contribution is warranted in the interests of promoting sustainable transport.
37. The obligations, with the exception of the enhanced affordable housing alternative, are necessary, directly related to the development and reasonable in scale and kind, and can be given weight in favour of the proposal.
38. A list of suggested conditions has been put forward, with no disagreements on these. The approved plans, as amended, should be specified for the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning. Phasing should be approved

to ensure the orderly development of the site. Details of materials and levels should be controlled in the interests of amenity.

39. Requirements on contamination and construction management are needed to safeguard residential amenity and that of the surrounding area. Conditions on electric vehicle charging and lighting are also warranted to protect the environment.
40. Details of drainage and flood protection should be approved to ensure that the proposal does not give rise to adverse effects in these respects. The submitted technical information indicates that, subject to satisfactory details, the proposal could be accommodated without such harmful impacts.
41. Trees and landscaping would be important elements in mitigating the visual impact of the proposal, warranting controls over these, which would also enable the relationship of the new features to neighbouring properties to be suitably considered. Requirements to ensure that proposed ecological protection measures are put in place are needed. With these and the planning obligation, the biodiversity of the site would be appropriately ensured.
42. On the basis of the amended access details, with the layout secured by condition prior to occupation, the technical evidence indicates that the proposal could satisfactorily accommodate vehicles and safely link to the road network.
43. Details of the open space provision and management should be provided to ensure that future needs are met, in conjunction with the planning obligation. Refuse storage and broadband provision should be secured to safeguard amenity and the environment.

Overall Balance and Conclusion

44. The proposal is in fundamental conflict with the development plan by reason of the location of the site within countryside. However, in the context of the serious shortfall in housing land supply the relevant policies are not up-to-date, overcoming the in principle objection to the development in geographical terms. With regard to the countryside protection aspect of the policies, there would be moderate harm and some limited erosion of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside in this case. However, the benefits of the proposal, in particular the gain in housing and specifically affordable housing, in the context of a serious shortfall in housing land supply, are of such importance as to outweigh the conflict with the development plan and justify a decision otherwise than in accordance with this. Adequate mitigation of adverse effects could be provided through obligations and conditions. The proposal would be sustainable development, and the impact on the countryside would not be sufficient to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole.
45. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

T G Phillimore

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: PL(00)106C, 107C, 108C, 109C, 110C, 111C, 100I, 101B; PL(20) 100A, 101A, 102A, 103A, 104A, 105A, 106A, 107A, 108A, 109A, 110A.
- 3) No development shall take place until a scheme of phasing has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved phasing.
- 4) No development shall take place until samples of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the dwellings and private driveways hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 5) No development shall take place until details of existing and proposed ground levels and the levels of proposed floor slabs have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 6) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following environmental protection measures:
 - a) The development shall be undertaken in accordance with the recommendations and methodology set out in the Phase 1 Contaminated Land Risk Assessment (Strata Surveys).
 - b) Should further ground investigations or excavations indicate that remediation is necessary, a Remediation Strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The remedial scheme in the approved Remediation Strategy shall then be carried out.
 - c) Should remediation be required, a Site Completion Report detailing the conclusions and actions taken at each stage of the works, including validation works, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority prior to the first use or occupation of any part of the development hereby permitted.
- 7) Prior to the development commencing, a Construction Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The plan shall include details of:
 - a) The hours of construction work and deliveries;
 - b) The parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors;
 - c) Loading and unloading of plant and materials;
 - d) Storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development;
 - e) Wheel washing facilities;
 - f) Any piling required including method (best practicable means to reduce the impact of noise and vibration on neighbouring sensitive properties), hours, duration, prior notification to the occupiers of potentially affected properties;

- g) The responsible person (e.g. site manager/office) who could be contacted in the event of complaint;
- h) Mitigation measures in respect of noise and disturbance during the construction phase including piling techniques, vibration and noise limits, monitoring methodology, screening, a detailed specification of plant and equipment to be used and construction traffic routes;
- i) Waste Management: There shall be no burning of materials on site during demolition/construction;
- j) A scheme to minimise dust emissions arising from demolition/construction activities on the site. The scheme shall include details of all dust suppression measures and the methods to monitor emissions of dust arising from the development.

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

- 8) Prior to the first occupation of the development hereby permitted, details of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure to be installed on the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. No property shall be occupied until the approved infrastructure relating to that property has been fully installed and is operational. The approved infrastructure shall thereafter be retained.
- 9) Prior to its installation details of the location, height, design, and luminance of any proposed external lighting in public open space and communal parking areas shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The details shall ensure the lighting is designed to minimise the potential loss of amenity caused by light spillage onto adjoining properties. The lighting shall thereafter be installed and operated in accordance with the approved details.
- 10) The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until such time as a scheme to limit the surface water runoff generated by the proposed development has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The approved scheme shall be implemented for each phase of development prior to the first occupation of that phase.
- 11) The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until such time as a scheme to manage the risk of flooding from overland flow of surface water has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The approved scheme shall be implemented for each phase of development prior to the first occupation of that phase. The site shall be drained on a separate system with only foul drainage connected into the foul sewer.
- 12) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following tree protection measures:
 - a) Prior to the commencement of development or other operations being undertaken on site a scheme for the protection of the retained trees produced in accordance with BS5837 which provides for the retention and protection of trees, shrubs and hedges growing on or adjacent to the site, including trees which are the subject of a Tree Preservation Order currently in force, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. No development or other operations

- shall take place except in complete accordance with the approved protection scheme.
- b) No operations shall be undertaken on site in connection with the development hereby approved (including any tree felling, tree pruning, demolition works, soil moving, temporary access construction and/or widening or any operations involving the use of motorised vehicles or construction machinery) until the protection works required by the approved protection scheme are in place.
 - c) No excavations for services, storage of materials or machinery, parking of vehicles, deposit or excavation of soil or rubble, lighting of fires or disposal of liquids shall take place within any area designated as being fenced off or otherwise protected in the approved protection scheme.
 - d) Protective fencing shall be retained intact for the full duration of the development hereby approved and shall not be removed or repositioned without the prior written approval of the local planning authority.
- 13) Prior to the commencement of development or other operations being undertaken on site in connection with the development hereby approved (including any tree felling, tree pruning, demolition works, soil moving, temporary access construction and/or widening, or any operations involving the use of motorised vehicles or construction machinery), a detailed Levels Survey, which provides for the retention of trees on the site, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. No alterations in site levels shall take place, except in complete accordance with the approved Survey. The Survey shall include existing and proposed spot levels at the base of and around the crown spreads of all trees specified for retention.
- 14) No development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority a scheme of hard and soft landscaping.
- 15) The approved landscaping scheme shall be completed in accordance with the following:
- a) All hard and soft landscaping works shall be completed in full accordance with the approved scheme, within the first planting season following completion of the development hereby permitted, or in accordance with a programme agreed with the local planning authority.
 - b) All trees, shrubs and hedge plants supplied shall comply with the requirements of British Standard 3936, Specification for Nursery Stock. All pre-planting site preparation, planting and post-planting maintenance works shall be carried out in accordance with the requirements of British Standard 4428(1989) Code of Practice for General Landscape Operations (excluding hard surfaces).
 - c) All new tree plantings shall be positioned in accordance with the requirements of Table 3 of British Standard BS5837.
 - d) Any trees, shrubs or hedges planted in accordance with this condition which are removed, die, become severely damaged or become seriously diseased within five years of planting shall be replaced within

the next planting season by trees, shrubs or hedging plants of similar size and species to those originally required to be planted.

- 16) A Landscape Management Plan, including long term design objectives, management responsibilities and maintenance schedules for all landscaped areas (other than domestic gardens) and the timber boardwalk around the new protection area shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority prior to commencement of any part of the development hereby permitted. The Landscape Management Plan shall be implemented as approved.
- 17) Prior to any commencement of works between 1st March and 31st August in any year a detailed survey shall be carried out to check for nesting birds and the results submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Where nests are found in any building, hedgerow, tree or scrub to be removed (or converted or demolished in the case of buildings), a 4m exclusion zone shall be left around the nest until breeding is complete. Completion of nesting shall be confirmed by a suitably qualified person and a further report submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority before any further works within the exclusion zone take place.
- 18) Prior to the commencement of development detailed proposals for the incorporation of features into the scheme suitable for use by breeding birds shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The approved features shall be permanently installed prior to the first occupation of the development hereby permitted and thereafter retained, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
- 19) No development shall take place except in complete accordance with the Ecological Assessment (Ref: 20400/R1/Rev3 dated 14 April 2014 by ATMOS).
- 20) The approved works shown on drawing PL(00)101B – Site Layout – Coloured shall be carried out prior to the first occupation of the development hereby permitted.
- 21) Prior to commencement of the development an Open Space Scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The Scheme shall include details of the location, layout, size, and timing of provision, proposed planting, location and type of any boundary structures, and specification of materials and play space equipment. In order to maintain the integrity and long term future viability of the open space, no site and works compounds shall be located on the open space areas without the prior written consent of the local planning authority. The open space shall be provided in accordance with the approved Open Space Scheme.
- 22) Prior to the implementation of any area of public open space identified in the Open Space Scheme, a Management Plan for the future management and maintenance of the open space shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The Plan shall identify the maintenance requirements including all ongoing maintenance operations, and shall be thereafter implemented in perpetuity.
- 23) No development shall commence until details of the proposed bin storage facilities have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The details shall ensure that bins are stored securely, and provide facilities for both recyclable and household waste storage. The

facilities for each dwelling shall be provided in accordance with the approved details prior to occupation of the dwelling.

- 24) No dwelling hereby approved shall be occupied until details indicating provisions to allow broadband services to all proposed dwellings within the development have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The necessary provisions shall then be implemented and thereafter retained in accordance with the approved details.

