Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 April 2026

by Stewart Glassar BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 June 2026

Appeal Ref: 6004569
Land to the West of South Hill Farm, Storrington Road, Thakeham, RH20 3EN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Cygnature Homes Ltd against the decision of Horsham District Council.
- The application Ref is DC/25/0053.
- The development proposed is the erection of 5no. detached dwellings with associated access, car ports and landscaping.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the appeal site would be a suitable location for the proposed development.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located outside the settlement boundary of Thakenham and in policy terms must be considered as open countryside. Although there is an emerging Local Plan, its proposed boundary changes would not affect the site.

4. The Horsham District Planning Framework 2015 (HDPF) sets out the development strategy for the district. Policy 2 of the HDPF sets out the broad spatial strategy for the district and seeks to focus development in and around the key settlement of Horsham and allow for growth in the rest of the district in accordance with the identified settlement hierarchy, which is set out in HDPF Policy 3.

5. Policy 4 does support settlement expansion outside of built up areas provided the site is allocated in the Local Plan or in a Neighbourhood Plan and adjoins an existing settlement edge. The appeal site does not adjoin a settlement boundary, nor is it an allocated site. As such the proposal would conflict with Policy 4.

6. In tandem with this approach, Policy 26 of the HDPF only permits development in the countryside where such a location is essential, and the proposal meets one of four criteria. These are that it either supports the needs of agriculture or forestry; enables the extraction of minerals or the disposal of waste; provides for quiet informal recreational use; or enables the sustainable development of rural areas. There is nothing before me which indicates that the proposal would meet any of the exceptions set out in Policy 26.

7. Whilst these policies are in some respects more restrictive than the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), their overall objectives are broadly

similar insofar as seeking to direct development to sustainable locations, allow villages to grow and thrive whilst limiting development in the open countryside.

8. As the Council has been unable to meet its housing land supply targets within the parameters of the existing development plan policies, it produced a Facilitating Appropriate Development Document 2022 (FAD). This set out an approach to boosting the supply of housing, pending adoption of the emerging Local Plan. This has since been replaced by the Shaping Development in Horsham District Planning Advice Note 2025 (PAN). The PAN largely repeats the relevant criteria for housing development proposals that were within the FAD.

9. The guidance takes a more positive stance on applications for housing outside settlement boundaries, subject to the criteria listed, all of which need to be satisfied. These maintain the requirement that proposals should be for sites which adjoin the existing settlement edge as defined by the built-up area boundary. As the proposed development would not meet that requirement, the extent to which it would accord with the other criteria is of limited relevance.

10. Notwithstanding the above, it is suggested that given the availability of sustainable transport options and proximity of services and facilities the site would represent a sustainable location. The site is located close to other houses and I saw signs for a pub and a church on The Street. However, I have not been made aware of any other facilities at The Street and there were no pavements or street lighting to assist pedestrians to reach the church or pub.

11. Walking to the nearest facilities in Abingworth involves using an informal path, which is in effect the roadside verge, and/or walking on a short section of the B2139. Although my site visit represents only a snapshot of a weekday morning, the B2139 did not appear to be a quiet country lane, instead being subject to regular traffic movements in both directions. The informal path is narrow, unlit and at the time of my visit uneven in places. The road itself is relatively narrow and enclosed by banking and mature trees and planting on either side. Despite the distances involved it would not instinctively be an option everyone would wish to undertake or feel safe using.

12. After using the informal path/B2139, it would be possible to then use footpath THA-2479 to get to Abingworth. There is a pre-school, community hall, shop and sports facilities in Abingworth although from my observations the shop appears to offer only a limited selection of provisions. I have not been provided with any details as to the distances to these facilities but from the information before me, a return trip on foot to access such facilities would, it seems to me, rarely be preferable to using a car.

13. I have no details as to whether cycling is permitted on the footpath or the extent to which it would be possible. I have not been presented with any other realistic cycling options from the appeal site. Indeed, from my observations and site visit, using the B2139 would not be an easy route for cyclists, who, given the limited width of the road, would feel under pressure from drivers wishing to overtake. I note the intention to provide cycle storage for the new houses, but this does not overcome the inherent difficulties of the site's location being a likely discouragement to cycling.

14. There is a bus stop some 100 metres to the east of the site. Again, this requires using the informal path or walking on the road. Similarly, waiting for a bus at the

westward stop would not be enticing given that it would involve standing on the overgrown verge or in the road close to a bend in the road. The eastbound bus stop does benefit from a small shelter.

15. The details provided by the Council indicate that only a single service is provided regularly Monday to Friday, with sporadic availability on Thursdays. The timings provided do not suggest that the service would in reality offer a genuine choice of transport mode that would promote sustainable transport options and thus enable future residents to not use a car on occasions.

16. The highway authority did not object to the scheme on the basis of sustainability albeit their assessment seems to be limited to the provision of the bus stop and service. Whilst they note the limited public transport accessibility and that this may be anticipated in a rural area, it does not mean that the scheme is acceptable and does not in any event absolve me from making an assessment as to its effects in regard to the main issue in this case.

17. The scheme before me is for 5 dwellings, each of which would have five bedrooms and sufficient space on each plot for 3 or 4 cars. The scale of development is said to be commensurate with the size of Thakenham and the distances to Abingworth and Storrington might not be overly long in a car. Nonetheless, the potential number of journeys to be undertaken by private motor vehicles from the site would not help to reduce emissions, nor improve air quality or public health.

18. The private car would perform a significant role in enabling any future occupiers of the houses to access facilities and services. I have not found the proposal to offer genuine sustainable transport solutions. There are some nearby dwellings with similar accessibility constraints but they do not justify the current proposals for additional dwellings and journeys or demonstrate compliance with the Framework.

19. I am mindful of the rural context of the appeal site, and the advice set out at Framework paragraph 110, which acknowledges that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. Nonetheless, it also maintains the requirement to actively manage growth to support sustainable travel and prioritise non-car modes. Furthermore, the appeal site would not be easily accessible by sustainable means for all, nor would safe access to the development be provided for all users, as advised at Framework paragraph 115.

Findings

20. For the reasons set out above, the appeal site would not be a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to local and national planning policy and guidance, being in conflict with the relevant parts of policies 2, 3, 4 and 26 of the HDP, the aims of which I have outlined above. The proposal would also be in conflict with the parts of the Framework dealing with sustainable transport, as outlined above.

Other Matters

21. The Council is unable to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing land. The information before me indicates that it is approximately equivalent to a years' supply. This weighs in favour of the development.

22. The appellant indicates that they intend to purchase off-site biodiversity credits from the Environment Bank. On this basis the scheme would be capable of meeting the mandatory requirements for a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The statutory BNG condition would apply to any permission and is a matter the appellant would need to address directly with the Council. In such circumstances there would be no need for a separate legal agreement. The provision of BNG weighs in favour of the scheme.

23. There are a number of aspects of the scheme such as landscaping, drainage, access etc. which were not contentious in this appeal. Also, there was agreement between the main parties that the site is not isolated and that there would be no harm to neighbours or to the character and appearance of the area. These all represent an absence of harm and so are neutral factors in my decision.

24. Given the revised position of Natural England on the issue of water neutrality, an off-set scheme and/or conditions requiring such provision would not be required.

25. The nearby mushroom factory site is not allocated for housing and although the appellant indicates that the recent appeal decision for 247 dwellings was dismissed 'largely' on the basis of there being too many houses I have not been provided with a copy of that decision, so cannot be sure as to what other factors may be applicable in that decision. A revised proposal for fewer houses has been submitted but I have no information to suggest that a decision has been made on it or that it affects the sustainable transport options for the appeal site. As such, the weight I can attribute to the situation is limited.

26. The appellant has referenced other decisions, providing selected quotes but not the full decisions or backgrounds to them. I have though had regard to what has been presented to me. The appeal decisions in particular indicate that being in breach of certain policies or guidance is not necessarily in itself an automatic reason to reject a scheme. These appeal decisions also highlight the extent of undersupply of housing in the district. Assessing the extent of compliance with policy and guidance and the weight to be afforded to other material considerations, including the housing supply position, is addressed in the planning balance below.

Planning Balance

27. The proposal would be outside the built up boundaries of a settlement and thus within the open countryside, contrary to the spatial strategy for the area. Nevertheless, I am mindful that local policies are not meeting the expectations of national policy and even with additional guidance in place there remains a large undersupply of housing. Whilst the objective for housing to be located within settlements accords with the Framework, the information before me indicates that the current boundaries are out of date. Thus, I give this conflict with the development plan limited weight.

28. As the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, Paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the Framework is engaged. It advises that where policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, planning 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.

29. The proposal would provide five dwellings in the district and positively contribute to local housing needs. As indicated by paragraph 73 of the Framework, small and medium sites can make an important contribution to meeting housing requirements. Whilst in numerical terms the number of dwellings is not large, given the housing supply situation the provision of each dwelling takes on added importance.

30. There would be associated economic benefits during construction of the houses and related employment for its duration, as well as future occupiers spending in the local economy. Future residents might be active in the local community. As noted above there would be positive weight attributable to the provision of BNG. Collectively, all the benefits cited above are of considerable weight in support of the scheme.

31. Whilst a key aim of the Framework is to significantly boost the supply of housing, when read as a whole the Framework does not suggest this should happen at the expense of other considerations.

32. The Framework, in seeking to achieve sustainable development requires growth to be actively managed, sustainable travel to be supported and non-car modes prioritised. Whilst I recognise that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions vary between urban and rural areas, the appeal site would not be easily accessible by sustainable means for all, nor would safe access to the development be provided for all users, as advised at Framework paragraph 115.

33. Given all of the above, the proposal would not accord with the Framework's objectives. I therefore consider that the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

34. As such, having regard to Paragraph 11 (d)(ii), the proposal would not benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out within the Framework.

Conclusion

35. I have found that the proposal conflicts with the development plan, when taken as a whole. Even when considered cumulatively, the weight given to the other material considerations would not outweigh the identified harm. Accordingly, they do not indicate that permission should be granted contrary to the development plan. Therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

Stewart Glassar

INSPECTOR