Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 June 2026

by Nicola Davies BA DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 07 July 2026

Appeal Ref: 6007707
Land adjoining No.2 and No.3 Townhouse Cottages, Townhouse Farm, Coolham Road, THAKEHAM RH20 3EW

- 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 Fowlers Land and New Homes against the decision of Horsham District Council.
- The application Ref is DC/25/1909.
- The development proposed is the demolition of existing storage unit and erection of 2no. detached dwellings, associated private gardens, parking and landscaping.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this case are whether the site is suitable for the proposed development, having regard to the spatial strategy of the development plan, and access to services and facilities.

Reasons

3. Policies 2, 3 and 4 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (the HDPF) set out the growth strategy for the District focusing development in the main settlements or as expansions of those settlements and seek to ensure that development takes place in the most sustainable locations as possible. The appeal site is located approximately 0.2km from Thakeham and is outside of and beyond any built-up settlement boundary. The site is therefore located within the countryside in policy terms.

4. Pursuant to Policy 4 of the HDPF the Council has published a guidance document titled “Shaping Development in the Horsham District” where it is recognised that there are likely to be planning applications submitted outside of defined built-up area boundaries and on unallocated sites. This is a guidance document that sets out criteria. The appeal site does not adjoin a settlement edge as defined by the built-up area boundary, and the development would not meet all of the criteria set out within this document. The proposed development would therefore not be fully compliant with the guidance document.

5. In tandem with the above policy 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 recreation use; or enables the sustainable development of rural areas. The proposed development does not meet any of the criteria and, therefore, does not comply with Policy 26 of the HDPF.

6. The site, although hosting a redundant storage structure, comprises mostly of undeveloped grassland sited between existing residential properties and agricultural buildings. The wider area beyond this small cluster of residential and agricultural buildings is open countryside. The development would not represent urban sprawl or encroachment into the wider open countryside. Whilst these are attributes of the proposed scheme when taken on their own merits, the site is however located within the countryside beyond any settlement boundary and, for this reason, does not comply with development plan policy.

7. Thakeham is defined as a "Smaller Village" under Policy 3 of the HDPF, where these villages have limited services, facilities, social networks, but do have good accessibility to larger settlements or settlements with some employment but limited services, facilities, or accessibility.

8. The opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions vary between urban and rural areas. As noted above, the site is approximately 0.2km from Thakeham. The highway that leads to Thakeham does not host pedestrian pavements. As such, it would not be an attractive option to walk to Thakeham. There are Public Rights of Way (PRofW) in the area that would facilitate walking to Thakeham through fields and woodland, which would not be suitable for the elderly, those with mobility issues or parents with young children. It would however be possible to cycle to Thakeham.

9. The local planning authority highlight that PRofW footpath 2376 is located immediately to the east of the site that adjoins Public Footpath 2475 to The Street, Thakeham. Whilst the footpath may be paved it is unlit. I have also been directed by the appellant to paved Public Footpath 2474. It would also be unlit and would require future occupiers to walk approximately 1km to access the limited facilities within the village. These footpaths would only be attractive during clement weather and during the hours of daylight.

10. From the information provided it appears that public footpath 2474 would connect with Storrington Road (B2139) and a development at Abingworth that includes community facilities, a café/store, village hall, recreation areas and open space. However, it appears to me that those facilities are located further from the appeal site than Thakeham and, as such, are further afield.

11. The appeal site is located within proximity to bus stops. Timetables provided by the local planning authority indicate connection between Thakeham, Horsham and Storrington by a single regular service Monday to Friday. However, the timetable does not show there to be a service at the weekends.

12. Whilst the site would be located in close proximity to public footpaths leading to Thakeham built-up area, and within proximity of bus stops servicing Horsham and Storrington, these are unlikely to offer viable or attractive alternatives to private vehicle due to the distance and unlit nature of the PRofWs leading to Thakeham and the lack of the bus service at the weekends. The future occupiers would

therefore be reliant upon the amenities, services and facilities of other settlements, which has the potential to further increase reliance on private vehicles. Whilst the Highway Authority has raised no technical objection to the proposal, the local planning authority has identified accessibility and sustainability concerns pertaining to the proposal.

13. For these reasons, I conclude that the site would not be a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to the spatial strategy of the development plan and accessibility. The proposal would, therefore, conflict with Policies 1, 2, 3, 4 and 26 of the HDPF and the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

14. I have been directed to S5 - Criterion (e) of the emerging National Planning Policy Framework. However, that Policy Framework has not been formally adopted and therefore the criterion holds little weight in favour of the proposal.

Other Matters

15. It is suggested that residential redevelopment has been permitted within the cluster of development surrounding Townhouse Cottages. The appellant makes no reference to the specifics of these applications, however on the Council's review of the planning history, it is noted that a number of residential conversions have taken place over the years. These related to former agricultural buildings converted to dwellings. The considerations pertaining to the conversion of existing buildings in the rural area would be different to that of new buildings, which is the case here.

16. I have been referred to a site known as Abbots Leigh at Storrington whereby a Planning Inspector (Appeal Ref: APP/Z3825/W/25/3363148) found the location to be acceptable outside of the built up area despite not being served by a lit access to the nearest settlement. That decision demonstrates that conflict with settlement boundary policy is not automatically decisive. The Planning Inspector attached substantial weight to the provision of a single dwelling in the same Horsham District policy context. It is suggested that there is no reasoned basis for attributing lesser weight to this proposal. I note also that that site was not served by a lit access to the nearest settlement.

17. I have also been referred to a recent appeal decision at Quince Cottage, Mill Lane, Partridge Green, RH13 8JU (Appeal Ref: 6004865) where the Inspector attached positive weight to the delivery of 2 dwellings as a small site capable of being developed quickly and found that, despite conflict with countryside policies, the proposal benefited from the presumption in favour of sustainable development. However, I note that the Inspector considered there would be sufficient sustainable transport options available to future residents to allow them to access services and facilities in Partridge Green.

18. Notwithstanding this, the local planning authority has provided 7 other appeal decision examples that over recent years have been considered against the same development plan policy context (appeal refs: APP/Z3825/W/21/3280084, APP/Z3825/W/24/3352708, APP/Z3825/W/25/3365004, APP/Z3825/W/24/3341185, APP/Z3825/W/24/3346736, APP/Z3825/W/25/3375892 and APP/Z3825/W/25/3371528). I accept that not all these cases dealt with the issue of accessibility. Nonetheless, in each case the principle of residential development has been considered and the tilted balance applied. The proposed

developments were on a site within the countryside and not allocated for development and were found to be in conflict with the District's spatial strategy for housing.

19. I acknowledge that parallels can be drawn with regard to each of the cases highlighted above. Nonetheless, those cases were considered upon their own specific facts and merits. Equally this case can and should be considered on its own individual circumstances and merits.

Planning Balance

20. The Council advises that it cannot demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply. The most recent Annual Monitoring Report 2024/2025 indicates there to be a 1.7-year housing land supply. Therefore, those policies that direct housing growth within the District are out of date. As there is not a 5-year supply of deliverable sites in place, the provisions of paragraph 11d)ii of the Framework should be applied.

21. The proposal would create two high-quality family sized homes without causing any unacceptable impacts upon the living conditions of existing neighbouring occupiers. The design of the dwellings would be acceptable taken on their own merits and they would assimilate with the local character of the area and infill development between existing developments responding to the existing pattern of development. The proposal would secure Biodiversity Net Gain. The site is not covered by any landscape, heritage or ecological designations that might restrict development of the site. The proposal is also acceptable in other technical respects, such as, in highway, ecology and drainage terms, amongst others, subject to appropriately worded planning conditions. Nonetheless, the proposal would be required to be acceptable in respect of these individual planning considerations take on their own merits in order for planning permission to be forthcoming.

22. The adverse impacts arising from the proposal relate to the unsatisfactory location of the development, including the need for private travel. The proposal would dilute the District's overall growth strategy for the pattern of residential development and would also be contrary to the expectations of the Framework.

23. On the other hand, the Government's objective is to significantly boost the supply of homes and that the cumulative impact of developing small sites can help meet supply and be delivered quickly. Even if the deficit in housing land supply is acute, two dwellings would make a modest difference to the overall supply of housing and the support two dwellings would provide to the social and local economy would be minimal. The contribution to the economy during the construction process would be temporary and short term. The harm that I have identified relating to the unsatisfactory location of the development and unsustainable location in regard of the reliance of private vehicle to access services and facilities, is not outweighed by the contribution to housing land supply or those limited environmental, social and economic benefits associated with the proposal.

24. Consequently, the adverse impact of the site's location and accessibility would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework when taken as a whole. As a result, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply.

25. The appellant contends that the local planning authority has applied incorrect weight to the housing need and the absence of identified harm suggesting that the

local planning authority's application of the tilted balance is incorrect. I have found that the development would undermine the adopted development plan special strategy for the District and significant weight should be attributed to this.

Conclusion

26. Having regard to the above findings, the appeal should be dismissed.

Nicola Davies

INSPECTOR