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Gentlemen

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1971, SECTION 36 AND SCHEDULE 9  
APPLICATION NO N.86.2308.OL



1. I have been appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment to determine your client's appeal against the decision of the North Wiltshire District Council to refuse outline planning permission for residential development on land at Chestnut Springs/The Mews, Lydiard Millicent. I have considered the written representations made by you and by the council, together with those made by Mr Richard Needham MP and by interested persons. I inspected the site on 28 July 1987.
2. From my inspection of the site and surroundings and my consideration of all the evidence and representations, it is my opinion that the main issue in this appeal is the suitability of the site for housing having regard to the planning policies governing development in the rural areas, the amount of land available for housing, and the effect of the development on the appearance of the area.
3. As you know, Circular 15/84 asks local authorities and builders to co-operate in preparing land availability studies. These studies should indicate whether there is a 5 years' supply of land available for development in line with approved structure and local plan policies, as well as indicating whether there is at least 2 years' supply of land on which development can start without delay.
4. The council states that at April 1986 all parts of the district had an adequate supply of land for housing that was genuinely available. The authority considers that it has acted to maintain this position in its proposals for the review of the statutory plans. This contrasts with your views. You refer to the Wiltshire Structure Plans Monitoring: Housing Land Availability Report of April 1986. Table 1.3 shows that in the Swindon sector of North Wiltshire District, in the Remainder of Sector category there is a shortfall of 170 dwellings.
5. To support its statement the council has produced figures which show that the total 5 year availability is 673 dwellings. However, this figure includes permissions granted since 1 April 1987. It is on a totally different basis from the latest information which I have before me from agreed county council figures. Also, I note that the sites included in the schedule are in Wootton Bassett, Cricklade and Purton. Significantly, these settlements are listed separately from the Remainder of Sector category in the county council land availability document; the relevant category as far as Lydiard Millicent is concerned.

6. It is important in questions of the housing land availability that there should be some measure of agreement. Joint studies of housing land availability bring together the house builders' assessment of market demand and the development potential of particular sites with local authorities' assessment of planning objectives. In this case, however, there is little agreement. Base dates are different. The areas under consideration are dissimilar. The net result is widely differing figures on availability. Yet the figures that you pray in aid are those of the county council and relate to the structure plan policies. I note also that the area representative of the Housebuilders' Federation considers the county council figures to be reliable. Therefore, from the information before me it is clear that the county council figures are to be preferred. Accordingly, I must conclude that in this case there is an absence of a five years supply of genuinely-available housing land. Arising from this shortfall, the added presumption exists in favour of the proposed development.

7. It is now important to examine the particular proposal against the relevant planning policies. The strategic policies for the area are contained in the North-East Wiltshire Structure Plan which was approved in 1981. The adopted local plan is the Cricklade and Purton Local Plan. It seeks to reflect and reinforce the strategic planning policies in a much more detailed, often site specific basis. Both plans aims to restrict the outward expansion of villages so as to protect the character of the countryside and the villages themselves. Development in the countryside is precluded unless it is in connection with the needs of agriculture. I note also the the recently-submitted Structure Plan Alterations and a new draft local plan contain no specific proposals for the development of the appeal site. I do note, however, that it is proposed to create a rural buffer to the west of Swindon and the draft local plan includes the site in this buffer. The purpose of this zone is to retain the separate identities of existing settlements.

8. The appeal site itself, which is some 2.1 hectares in size, lies on the south-east side of Lydiard Millicent. It is roughly rectangular in shape. To the north-west is a modern housing development; to the south-west is a property known as "The Paddocks", a large house set in extensive grounds. Open land is on the other two sides. Lydiard Millicent itself lies midway between Purton to the north-west and Swindon to the east. It seems that the village originally developed around the crossroads near the church. Development then took place along these roads. Later development, such as "The Chestnuts", took place in depth behind the frontages. Notwithstanding this development in depth, the net result is a sprawling settlement with few facilities which is almost suburban in appearance.

9. You consider that the appeal site does not extend further in the direction of Swindon than does the village at present. You refer to Park Lane and Downs View and the hedge boundaries along the site. Reference is also made to the convenient location of the village and your consideration that the scheme would hardly lead to the coalescence of settlements. Market research has identified a need for "executive" housing not proposed in the new areas of expansion of Swindon. You regard Lydiard Millicent and this site to be suitable for such housing.

10. I have no reason to question you assessment of market need and the suitability of the village for the type of housing you envisage. However, in my estimation, the planning policies aimed at restricting outward expansion of the villages are of worth in both visual and practical terms, realising as they do the need to relate new development to existing facilities. This is particularly important in the case of Lydiard Millicent which is close to Swindon and its

proposed new areas for expansion that there is a danger that the village could be overwhelmed. Hence, it is my view that the development would constitute an unacceptable extension of the village in a sensitive location. Notwithstanding the presence of the hedges, I consider that housing development on this flat, rather characterless site would add further to the nondescript estate development which has already taken place and which adds little to the visual or social cohesion of the settlement. In my opinion it would be seen as an unsightly protuberance into the surrounding countryside when approaching from the east.

11. In conclusion, I regard these objections are such as to outweigh the presumption in favour of development caused by the absence of an adequate supply of housing land. Also, I have taken into account all other matters raised in the representations but none are sufficient to outweigh the planning objections leading to my decision.

12. For the above reasons, and in exercise of the powers transferred to me, I hereby dismiss your appeal.

I am Gentlemen  
Your obedient Servant



T COOKSON DipTP MRTPI  
Inspector