



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 May 2000

by **Ruth V MacKenzie** BA(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for the
Environment, Transport and the Regions

The Planning Inspectorate
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Date
6 JUN 2000

Appeal: T/APP/H4505/A/00/1040029/P7

- 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 by Northern Electric Properties against Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council.
- The site is located on land north of Gullane Close, Bill Quay, Gateshead.
- The application (Ref No 688/99 dated 17 June 1999) was refused on 21 September 1999.
- The development proposed is a residential development of 18 houses.

Decision: The appeal is dismissed.

Background Information

1. The application is made in outline with all matters, except access, reserved for later determination. Access would be from Gullane Close, a residential cul-de-sac. A layout plan was submitted with the planning application, but I have treated this plan as being purely illustrative. The site comprises 1.6ha of agricultural land. There is more agricultural land to the north, and residential development to the west, south and east. A railway line runs along the site's eastern boundary.

The main issues

2. From all that I have seen and read, I consider that the main issues in this appeal are:
 - the impact of the proposed residential development on living conditions in Gullane Close, with particular reference to traffic; and,
 - the effect of the proposed residential development on the wildlife corridor in which the site is located.

The Development Plan and other policy considerations

3. I am required to decide the appeal having regard to the development plan, and to make my determination in accordance with it, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan for this area is the Gateshead Unitary Development Plan (UDP). UDP policy H2 seeks to protect the residential amenity of existing housing areas from any adverse effects of proposed development. The site is not allocated for housing, and UDP policy H15 makes it clear that, in such locations, housing proposals will be considered in relation to urban regeneration and should meet certain requirements, including the need to conserve the countryside. The site lies within a designated wildlife corridor, and UDP policy E41 says that the corridor should be protected by resisting development that would seriously impair its integrity or value to wildlife.
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4. I am also mindful of the government's guidance on housing in Planning Policy Guidance No 3 (PPG3). Amongst other things, this advises that previously-developed land should be used in preference to greenfield sites, in the interests of sustainability.

Inspector's reasons

The first issue – living conditions in Gullane Close

5. Gullane Close is a short cul-de-sac off Marian Drive, in the residential suburbs of Bill Quay. The cul-de-sac terminates at the southern boundary of the appeal site. The semi-detached and terraced houses in Gullane Close have short front gardens, and the road itself is narrow, varying in width from 4.8m to 5.0m. The Council's Director of Engineering Services considers that Gullane Close has the capacity to accommodate the traffic generated by 18 additional houses. This view accords with current highway guidance in *Places Streets and Movements, a Companion Guide to DB32* produced by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.
6. However, whilst Gullane Close might be wide enough in highway terms, I am concerned about the other effects of additional traffic. The residents of this cul-de-sac say that it is a tranquil living environment, where the absence of through traffic gives pleasure to everyone and allows the children to play safely outside their houses. I have no reason to doubt this. If the cul-de-sac were to be extended into the appeal site, the existing length of Gullane Close would seem more like a through road to those who live beside it. The road would be busier and noisier, and a more dangerous place for children. To my mind, this would worsen residential amenities, something that UDP policy H2 seeks to prevent. I accept that the appellant has offered to provide visitors' parking spaces and a play area within the proposed development, but in my view this would not compensate for the deterioration in Gullane Close's residential environment.
7. I have therefore decided on the first issue that the proposed residential development would have an adverse impact on living conditions in Gullane Close.

The second issue – the effect on the wildlife corridor

8. In accordance with the Nature Conservancy Council's strategy for Tyne and Wear, the Council has designated a network of local wildlife corridors. The corridor in which the appeal site lies is known as the Bill Quay to Wardley Country Park corridor. A wildlife survey of the site, commissioned by the appellant, revealed that there were no habitats or species of conservation importance. Nevertheless, I am in no doubt that this open field and its margins provide a habitat for a variety of wildlife. The fact that the site's wildlife may be of lesser conservation importance does not persuade me to accept the appellant's argument that this part of the corridor has no value. Such an argument could be repeated too often, and the end result would be a gradual dislocation of the network of wildlife corridors, and a depletion of the variety of wildlife that the corridors can support. If the site were to be developed with 18 houses, its existing habitats, and its potential to provide more, would be lost forever. This would have repercussions on wildlife elsewhere, because the corridor allows for the movement of animals and the spread of plants throughout the network.
9. I accept that domestic gardens can support wildlife too, but the range and diversity would be limited to that which can thrive in a residential environment. Indeed, I consider it reasonable to suppose that the corridors play an important part in channelling the wildlife into the residential environments; thus, if the corridors are dislocated, the wildlife in domestic

gardens would be depleted. UDP policy E41 seeks to prevent development within these wildlife corridors. There are exceptions to this rule; for example, where development would result in habitats being enhanced, or where suitable replacement land is provided. However, I do not consider that the appellant's proposal falls into either of these categories. The UDP is an up-to-date plan, and should be the foundation for my decision making. I can think of no good reason why I should disregard policy E41.

10. In the light of the above, I have decided on the second issue that the proposed residential development would have a harmful effect on the wildlife corridor in which the site is located.

Other matters

11. In my opinion, the site can be classified as countryside because of its agricultural use. According to UDP policy H15, proposals for housing on unallocated sites must conserve the countryside. The appeal proposal would not do this.

12. The appellant has calculated that residential development on the site would help to meet a housing shortfall; the Council disputes these calculations. From the information available to me, I am unable to reach a view on this matter. In any event, it is my conclusions on the 2 main issues that must carry the most weight in my decision-making.

Conclusions

13. I have reached the following conclusions on the 2 main issues:

- the proposed residential development would have an adverse impact on living conditions in Gullane Close; and,
- the proposed residential development would have a harmful effect on the wildlife corridor in which the site is located.

The proposal is therefore unacceptable.

14. In reaching my decision, I have taken into account all other matters raised. I agree that the site adjoins a residential area and is well-placed for schools and other facilities, but this does not override my concerns about the effect of the proposed development on the living conditions in Gullane Close, or the dislocation of a wildlife corridor. In any case, the site is a greenfield site and not previously-developed land. Its development is therefore not favoured by PPG3. Neither these, nor any other matters are sufficient to outweigh the considerations that have led me to my decision.

Formal decision

15. For the reasons given above, and in exercise of the powers transferred to me, I hereby dismiss this appeal.

Richard V. Strickland