



Department of the Environment

Room 13/19

Tollgate House Houlton Street Bristol BS2 9DJ

Telex 449321

Direct line 0272-218 875

Switchboard 0272-218811

GTN/2074

TECHNICAL SERVICES DEPT.

PLANNING SECTION

Messrs Wedlake Bell
Solicitors
16 Bedford Street
Covent Garden
LONDON WC2E 9HF

- 7 JAN 1981

FILE
No.

DATE

Your reference

GTW/30013/JB

Our reference

T/APP/5252/A/80/09263 & 09266/G7

Date

= 6 JAN 1981

Gentlemen

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1971, SECTION 36 AND SCHEDULE 9
APPEALS BY MR K R PEARCE AND MR D COULSON
APPLICATION NOS: 4/0689/80 and 4/0690/80

1. I refer to your clients' 2 appeals, which I have been appointed to determine, against the decision of the Dacorum District Council, to refuse outline planning permission for (i) a dwelling, stables and access and alternatively, for (ii) 3 dwellings and access, on land opposite Hollybush Farm, Hollybush Lane, Flamstead. I held a local inquiry into the appeal on Tuesday 9 December 1980.

2. From the representations and from my inspection of the appeal site and surroundings, I am of the opinion that the main issue in both cases is whether the proposed development would have a detrimental effect on the appearance and character of the surroundings having regard in particular to the location of the appeal site in relation to the village centre and nearby countryside and to the council's planning policies.

3. The main points that were made for your clients were that the appeals against 2 of the decisions had been withdrawn so that those remaining are (A) for one dwelling, stables and access; and (B) for 3 dwellings and access, as alternatives for the whole site. Although both applications are in outline, accompanying sketch plans illustrate a possible siting for the buildings in each case. The appeal site is a field of nearly 3 ha which is not owned or occupied as part of a farm. It is situated north-west of the village centre and it has a frontage of about 165 m to the south-west side of Hollbush Lane. Green belt policies do not apply to it because it is clearly outside the area recently approved as green belt in the Structure Plan and it is not in a possible main transport corridor extension to it, despite the boundary suggested for it on the draft District Plan. Flamstead is likely to be regarded as one of the selected smaller villages referred to in Policy 15 of that Plan and it is mentioned in Policy G.5 of the draft District Plan, with other villages in which infilling is described as an appropriate form of development. Although the general objective of further development in those villages without harming their character or environment is accepted, the detailed criteria in Policy G.5 seem inappropriate to Flamstead because there are hardly any such sites in the area that the council describes as the main core of the village.

4. It was also stated for your clients that the erection of one or 3 dwellings would be in accordance with the kind of incremental growth that is appropriate for Flamstead as a rural service village. Such development would not affect the appearance or character of the old centre of the village, which is in a Conservation Area, and it would not be visible from the valley, or the higher ground to the north

except where seen against the background of other buildings in the village. It would be in character with Hollybush Lane which is lined with dwellings on its north-east side. All services are available. The appeal site is the nearest vacant and suitable land for development to the village centre in Hollybush Lane. As it lies between dwellings on its north-west and south-east sides, its development might properly be regarded as rounding off this end of the village.

5. The Structure Plan Policy 15 refers to development within the confines of larger villages and infilling within the main cores of smaller villages. From the evidence, it appears likely that Flamstead is regarded as a smaller village and, if the planning officer's suggestion is accepted, that the main core would be the compact area within which development in depth has occurred. It was apparent from the evidence and from my inspection that there could be very few infilling plots within such a main core in accordance with the detailed infilling criteria in the draft District Plan, although the view expressed for your clients was that regard should be directed not to these criteria but to the policy objectives of preventing development in circumstances where the location, shape or topography of the site would be detrimental to the character of the village or the surrounding area, as stated in the Structure Plan and the draft District Plan.

6. Evidence for your clients was that the normal, incremental growth of Flamstead would include a certain amount of frontage development along the village approach roads, such as the proposed development along Hollybush Lane, but for the council it was maintained that the hill-top environment of Flamstead is different to the countryside on the lower slopes where the appeal site is situated. During my inspection, I saw that the village centre with its church and most of the old buildings stands on fairly level ground at the top of the slope on the south-west side of the River Ver valley, about 30 m (100 ft) above the valley bottom where the river and the main A5 road are situated. Development has spread along the roads leading from the village centre, including a row of dwellings mostly built post-1950 along the north-east side of Hollybush Lane to Hollybush Farm buildings, which are about 300 m from the village centre and are about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way down the slope into the valley. Although it was stated for your clients that these buildings give a village character to Hollybush Lane in general, I noted that the village recreation ground occupies over 100 m of frontage on the south-west side and that there are only 3 dwellings beyond it. Two of them are between the recreation ground and the appeal site and the third is about 200 m beyond, with the appeal site occupying the space between. Thus the character of Hollybush Lane appears to be like River Hill and Singlets Lane where one side is developed and the other side is mainly open. Furthermore, the slope of Hollybush Lane is quite gradual along the recreation ground frontage but from the easterly corner of the appeal site, along its frontage and for about 150 m beyond, the slope is somewhat steeper before flattening again as it approaches the bottom of the valley. This change in topography tends to distinguish the character of the appeal site and surroundings from the main core of the village on the higher, more level ground. As a result of these factors, I do not consider that the existence of the 3 dwellings near the appeal site, which are about 40-50 years old, is sufficient to justify its development as part of the incremental growth of the village.

7. I note that the District Plan is still in its draft form so that the Council's detailed policies towards development in Flamstead might turn out to be less restrictive than the application of the detailed criteria in Policy G.5 on a compact village core. However, I saw that much of the recent development in the village has been in the form of dwellings fronting short new roads, so as to result in a compact developed area on the level ground close to the church and the old buildings in the village. In my opinion, the continuation of such a form of development, if practicable and if considered desirable, would be at least as appropriate for the village as its linear extension in the form of the proposed development.

8. I consider that the building of 3 dwellings on the part of the appeal site frontage nearest the centre of the village would have less visual impact than if they were to occupy the whole frontage and that the appearance of one dwelling, particularly if it were situated nearest the centre of the village, would have even less effect. However, because I am of the opinion that the appeal site has more in common with the character of the surrounding countryside than the village I consider that even one dwelling, wherever situated, would have an unduly detrimental effect on the surroundings. I have taken into account all the other matters in the representations but I am of the opinion that they do not outweigh the considerations that led me to my decision.

9. For the above reasons, and in exercise of the powers transferred to me, I hereby dismiss both of your clients' appeals.

I am Gentlemen
Your obedient Servant

D. J. Tuckett

D J TUCKETT ARICS MRTPI
Inspector