



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 May 2008

by **Martyn Heyes** BSc(ENG), MEng, PhD,
CEng, FICE, FIHT

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State
for Communities and Local Government

The Planning Inspectorate
4/11 Eagle Wing
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Temple Quay
Bristol BS1 6PN

0117 372 6372
email: enquiries@dps.gsi.gov.uk

Decision date:
11 June 2008

Appeal Ref: APP/U2235/A/08/2066167

Meadowcroft, Maidstone Road, Headcorn, Kent TN27 9RS.

- 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 made by Mrs S Sturgeon against the decision of Maidstone Borough Council.
- The application Ref MA/07/1179, dated 1 June 2007, was refused by notice dated 11 October 2007.
- The development proposed is the construction of a new chalet bungalow within land adjacent to Meadowcroft.

Decision

1. I dismiss the appeal.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether there are any material reasons to justify the proposed development in the light of the objectives of national and local policies to promote sustainable development and safeguard the character of the countryside.

Reasons

3. Meadowcroft is a bungalow in a large plot, and is one of a small group of isolated properties which front onto the A274 Primary Road, some 1.2km north of the village of Headcorn. Despite the presence of a number of recently built homes, the area is designated as a Special Landscape Area and its character is defined by the surrounding farmland.
4. Both national and local policies require new development to be strictly controlled in such a location, and set stringent tests for the justification of exceptions. There is no suggestion that this proposal should be an exception on the grounds set out in Planning Policy Statement 7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* (PPS7) or that it is one of the recognised exceptions set out in Policy ENV28 of the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan (LP).
5. The appellant's intention is to provide affordable housing for her daughter and to help to alleviate to the present deficiency of such accommodation in the locality. Although PPS3: *Housing* encourages local authorities to consider the release of affordable housing sites in rural areas, it specifically refers to sustainable communities in market towns and villages. However, this is not a

4

definition which I would associate with this group of houses which lie beyond what I would consider easy walking distance of the village, and have no local facilities.

6. The Council is on target to meet its general housing allocations and has made provision for affordable housing in Headcorn in the recent past. While I have noted the appellant's family circumstances, it is not clear to me how these relate specifically to this proposal. I note also the appellant's unilateral undertaking which seeks to ensure that the dwelling would remain in perpetuity occupied by persons eligible for affordable housing. However, it seems to me that, even discounted, the proposed 4 bedroom chalet-style house with a double garage would not be consistent with the normal provision of affordable housing. As a result, I would expect this to lead to pressure for the property to be offered on the open market in due course. These circumstances contrast sharply with the modest bungalow recently approved in Kingwood, which has been suggested as a possible precedent.
7. The proposed development would act to consolidate the existing spasmodic development and, by reason of its size and bulk, would have a significant impact on the openness of the locality. In my assessment this would not accord with saved LP Policy ENV28 which seeks to restrain harmful development in the countryside, or saved Policy ENV34 which requires priority to be given to protecting the landscape over other planning considerations in this Special Landscape Area.
8. I have carefully considered the other points raised by the appellant but, given the harm that I have identified and the lack of evidence of sufficient weight to justify such an exception to the Development Plan, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Martyn P Heyes

INSPECTOR