



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 March 2026

by **Laura Bartle BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13 April 2026

Appeal Ref: 6002055

Land north of B5067 and adjoining crossroads, Walford Heath, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 2HS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant permission in principle.
 - The appeal is made by D & C Reece against the decision of Shropshire Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/03186/PIP.
 - The development proposed is described as 'application for permission in principle for the development of between four and five dwellings on land to the north of the B5067 and adjoining the crossroads at Walford Heath, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY4 2HS'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and permission in principle is granted for residential development comprising a minimum of four dwellings and a maximum of five dwellings at land north of B5067 and adjoining crossroads, Walford Heath, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 2HS in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 25/03186/PIP.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal is for permission in principle. Planning Practice Guidance advises that this is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. The permission in principle consent route has 2 stages: the first stage (or permission in principle stage) establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle and the second ('technical details consent') stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed. This appeal relates to the first of these 2 stages.
3. The scope of the considerations for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and the amount of development permitted. All other matters are considered as part of a subsequent Technical Details Consent application if permission in principle is granted. I have determined the appeal accordingly.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the site is suitable for residential development, having regard to its location, the proposed land use and the amount of development.

Reasons

Suitability of location

5. The location and distribution of new housing is set out in Policy MD1 of the Site Allocations and Management of Development Plan (SAMDev Plan). It translates the proportional split of housing provided by Policy CS1 of the Shropshire Local Development Framework: Adopted Core Strategy (Core Strategy) into development parameters for individual settlements. Around 35% of new housing development is expected to take place within Shropshire's rural areas, with growth here directed to Community Hubs and Cluster Settlements. While a conflict with Core Strategy Policy CS1 is not included in the Council's reason for refusal, the Council has made reference to such a conflict elsewhere in its submissions.
6. Schedule MD1.1 of the SAMDev Plan identifies Walford Heath as a Community Cluster Settlement within the Shrewsbury area. Policy S16.2(xv) explains that development by limited infilling/conversions of buildings may be acceptable and sets a housing guideline of approximately 6 additional dwellings over the period to 2026, in addition to 10 already approved.
7. There is no defined development boundary for Walford Heath, and the main parties disagree on whether the appeal site should be regarded as countryside for the purposes of the development plan. The site forms part of an agricultural field situated at the main crossroads within the village. Although residential properties lie opposite the site and adjoin its north-western boundary, the pattern of development becomes noticeably more dispersed along the roads to the north-east and south-east. Consequently, the site plays a role in the transition between the built-up frontage of the settlement and the open fields extending to the north and east. For these reasons development on the site would not constitute infill.
8. Accordingly, I have treated the site as countryside for the purposes of the development plan. The proposed open-market housing would therefore conflict with the requirements for development in the countryside set out in Core Strategy Policy CS5 and Policy MD7a of the SAMDev Plan.
9. Part 3 of Policy MD3 states that additional sites outside a settlement development boundary may be acceptable where a settlement's housing guideline appears unlikely to be met, subject to the considerations in Part 2 of that policy. The Council indicates that 20 dwellings had been completed in Walford Heath as of 31 March 2024. On this basis, it considers that the housing guideline in Policy S16.2(xv) has already been exceeded.
10. The appellant seeks to demonstrate that there is residual capacity for a further 3 dwellings, referring to planning permissions granted after the adoption of the SAMDev Plan in 2015. However, the appellant also relies on the Council's five-year housing land supply evidence and the 20 dwellings recorded as completed between 2011 and 2024. I have not been provided with the housing land supply evidence to which both parties refer, though the completion figures themselves do not appear to be disputed. As Table MD1.1 of the SAMDev Plan confirms that the plan period runs from 2006 to 2026, I have no basis on which to conclude anything other than that the 16 dwellings identified in Policy S16.2(xv) have been achieved.

11. That said, the provision of 16 dwellings is not intended to operate as a cap. Part 2 of Policy MD3 of the SAMDev Plan sets out the criteria against which proposals will be assessed where they would result in housing numbers exceeding the guideline figure.
12. The appeal proposal would result in an increase of up to 9 completed dwellings in Walford Heath above the applicable housing guideline. However, the current plan period concludes in 2026. Reference has been made by the parties to a revised settlement hierarchy contained within a now-withdrawn Local Plan. The Council accepts that no weight can be afforded to the categorisation of the village within that document, and I agree. On the evidence before me, there is currently no emerging development plan that prescribes the scale of further growth in Walford Heath beyond 2026 to which weight can be attributed.
13. I acknowledge that residents of Walford Heath rely on facilities and services in nearby settlements. Footpath connections are poor, and although a bus service passes through the village with stops close to the site, most day-to-day trips are likely to be undertaken by private car. Given this degree of car reliance, the sustainability credentials of the site are limited in accessibility terms.
14. There is no indication that the proposal would address any identified need for affordable housing. However, as up to 5 dwellings could be provided, the requirement for on-site affordable housing set out in Core Strategy Policy CS11 may be engaged. These are, however, matters for consideration at the technical details stage.
15. The development would be visible from both roads adjoining the site. Notwithstanding this, any new dwellings would be read in the context of existing domestic built form, with which the site boundary broadly aligns. In this context, the continuation of development would not appear incongruous.
16. I acknowledge the Council's concerns that the proposal would create a visual barrier to views of the surrounding countryside from locations along the B5067. However, these views are localised to areas close to the site, and the effects would diminish substantially at longer distances. A gap exists between the crossroads and the more dispersed development to the south-east. Consequently, even if built form were to extend across the width of the site, a visual break would remain, retaining views to the wider landscape and preserving the sense of transition between the more built-up part of the settlement and the rural surroundings beyond.
17. Taken together, I am satisfied that, insofar as the principle of development is concerned, the proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the settlement. Matters relating to detailed siting, design, layout and house types would be addressed at the technical details stage. I therefore find no conflict with SAMDev Policy MD2 and the requirement for development to respect locally distinctive or valued character. I also find no conflict with Policy CS11 insofar as it requires a development to provide an appropriate mix of house types and affordability.
18. However, the proposed development of between 4 and 5 dwellings outside the settlement would conflict with the overall strategy for the scale and distribution of development set out in SAMDev Plan Policy MD1. It would not meet any of the criteria for development that may be acceptable in the countryside under Core

Strategy Policy CS5 or SAMDev Plan Policy MD7a. The proposal would also conflict with Core Strategy Policy CS6 insofar as it seeks to reduce the need for car-based travel. In conclusion, the development would be unacceptable in terms of its location.

Land use and amount of development

19. The site could be put to other uses appropriate to a rural area, but the proposed residential use would be consistent with the adjoining pattern of development. Notwithstanding my conclusions on the unsuitability of the location in policy terms, the proposed land use itself would be acceptable.
20. The evidence before me demonstrates that the site is of a size and configuration capable of accommodating 4 or 5 dwellings, although the precise number would be a matter for consideration at the technical details consent stage. The nearby pattern of built development, which includes clusters of residential properties of comparable density, indicates that development of this magnitude would not appear incongruous. In principle, therefore, the scale of development proposed is acceptable.

Other Matters

21. As the appeal site forms part of the setting of a listed building, I have had special regard to section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Grade II milepost is located approximately 80 metres to the north-west of the crossroads. Based on the evidence before me, its special interest and significance derive principally from its historic value as an example of an early to mid-19th century cast-iron milepost, with its characteristic triangular section, chamfered top and superscribed serif lettering. It forms part of a series of similar waymarkers positioned along the road between Shrewsbury and Baschurch.
22. A heritage asset's significance also derives from its setting. For this milepost, the elements of setting that contribute to its special interest include its position on the grass verge and its close relationship with the highway. The appeal site is separated from the asset by a hedgerow and, to some extent, by existing roadside properties.
23. New housing on the site would have some effect on the wider setting, as the dwellings would likely be visible in the background alongside existing development. However, there is no persuasive evidence before me to suggest that an appropriately sympathetic design could not be achieved at the technical details stage. Such an approach could ensure that the character of the area is respected and that the verge and hedgerow are sufficiently retained. I am therefore satisfied that the proposal would not adversely affect the setting or harm the significance of the listed milepost.
24. I have had regard to the comments made by interested parties; however, my assessment is confined to matters relevant to an application for permission in principle. In that context, I recognise that the site is not previously developed land, but this factor alone does not render the proposed residential land use unacceptable in principle at this location. Moreover, there is no compelling technical evidence before me to indicate that permission in principle should be withheld on the grounds of highways, flood risk, drainage or impacts on protected

species. Nor is there evidence to suggest that the necessary infrastructure to support the proposal could not be adequately provided.

25. Many of the concerns raised relate to matters that would be assessed at the technical details consent stage. Indeed, planning permission would not exist unless both permission in principle and technical details consent are granted.

Planning Balance

26. A decision on whether to grant permission in principle must be made in accordance with the relevant policies of the development plan, unless material considerations, including those in the Framework, indicate otherwise. While the proposed use and the amount of development are acceptable in principle, the proposal would not accord with the development plan when considered in relation to its location, as set out above.
27. There is no dispute that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites, and it confirms that its current position is 3.81 years. The presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out by paragraph 11(d) of the Framework is therefore applicable. The application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance do not provide a strong reason for refusing the development proposed. Accordingly, the Framework sets out that planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies that it specifies.
28. The provision of 4 or 5 additional homes would be a benefit of the scheme and the Framework indicates that small and medium sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement for an area. The proposal would also give rise to short-term economic benefits during the construction phase, together with longer-term expenditure by future occupiers, at least some of which would be likely to support services in the local area to a modest extent. As such the proposal would contribute to the vitality of rural communities consistent with paragraph 83 of the Framework. While the Council's housing supply shortfall is significant, having regard to the limited number of dwellings proposed, I accord these benefits moderate weight overall.
29. Core Strategy Policy CS1 and SAMDev Plan Policy MD1 are broadly consistent with the Framework insofar as they seek to direct development to accessible locations. However, policy CS5 of the Core Strategy and MD7a of the SAMDev Plan adopt a restrictive approach to housing in providing for only certain forms of development in the countryside. Paragraph 83 of the Framework adopts a more balanced approach to housing in rural areas and provides some limited support for the proposal as discussed above. In that context a rigid application of the development strategy through policy CS1 and CS5 of the Core Strategy and MD1 and MD7 of the SAMDev Plan would only further frustrate housing supply in Shropshire, and thus overall, the conflicts I have identified attract limited weight.
30. Although access to services and facilities would mostly be made using private vehicles there would be some opportunity for future occupiers to use public transport for some trips as discussed above. Moreover, paragraph 110 of the Framework indicates that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. Accordingly, I give modest weight to the

harm that would arise from the degree of dependence on and related impacts from private motor vehicles, and the associated conflicts with Policy CS6 of the Core Strategy.

31. Whilst there is harm arising due to the policy conflict referred to above, the Council is currently failing to deliver sufficient homes to meet the five-year housing land supply requirement. Overall, the adverse impacts attract modest weight. Consequently, I find that these would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits that would arise from the proposed development, when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole. The proposal therefore benefits from the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Conclusion

32. The proposal would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. However, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is a material consideration which outweighs that conflict. Material considerations therefore indicate that a decision should be taken which is not in accordance with the development plan. Accordingly, the appeal should be allowed.

Laura Bartle

INSPECTOR