
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 September 2016

by Joanna Reid BA(Hons) BArch(Hons) RIBA

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

Decision date: 27 September 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/M3645/W/16/3149738

Beddlestead Farm, Beddlestead Lane, Warlingham, Surrey CR6 9QN

- 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 Mr Angus Hastie of Country House Wedding Venues Ltd against the decision of Tandridge District Council.
 - The application Ref TA/2016/100, dated 20 January 2016, was refused by notice dated 15 March 2016.
 - The development proposed is "Alterations to the main house to provide additional en-suite guest accommodation and a venue for civil marriage and civil partnership ceremonies; the conversion and external alteration of an outbuilding (Forge Cottage) to form an administrative office and bridal preparation room; alterations to the barns (including demolition of a garage) and erection of a new lightweight link building to create a reception venue comprising reception area, bar, WCs, kitchen and storage. External improvements to provide a terrace and car park with enhancements to the landscape."
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The main house at Beddlestead Farm is listed in Grade II* as 'Beddlestead House', and Barn B, as identified on the application plans, is listed in Grade II. The Council has granted Listed Building Consent subject to conditions for works to the listed buildings, and it has not raised concerns about the listed buildings or their settings. I see no reason to disagree.

Main issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and, if so, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Green Belt

4. The appeal site, which includes an irregularly-shaped piece of land and buildings at Beddlestead Farm, is located roughly west of Beddlestead Lane within the Green Belt.

5. The *National Planning Policy Framework* (Framework) explains that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt.
6. Certain forms of development are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. These include engineering operations and the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction.
7. Policy DP10 of the *Tandridge Local Plan Part 2: Detailed Policies 2014-2029* (LP) says that within the Green Belt, planning permission for any inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt, will normally be refused. LP Policy DP13 explains that unless very special circumstances can be clearly demonstrated, the construction of new buildings will be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this include the re-use of buildings for commercial or residential purposes where a number of criteria are met, including that the proposed re-use can be wholly or substantially contained within the building identified for re-use. They also include the extension or alteration of buildings, where the proposal does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building, and the replacement of buildings where the proposed new building is not materially larger than the building it is replacing.
8. The proposed re-use of the existing buildings, including the extension between Barns A and B that would not exceed the size of the parts of existing buildings that would be demolished, would not amount to inappropriate development. However, the proposal would also include hard-standing for a new car parking area in the existing mainly open field to roughly south of Barn B.
9. The parking spaces would be constructed using a plastic cellular system that would be finished with either pea shingle or a seeded growing compound. Roughly 34 pea shingle finished parking bays would be reached by a tarmac central aisle from the existing drive to Beddlestead Farm. There would also be about 15 grass finished parking spaces for overflow parking. The car park, which would require an engineering operation to form it, would be located where it would be largely screened from the listed buildings by existing buildings, and from the surrounding countryside to roughly west by the existing tall planting along the roughly western boundary. Additional tree and hedge planting is also proposed to screen parked cars in other views, including views from the lane and along the drive that leads to the listed buildings.
10. Whilst the car park could have almost no effect on its openness, the intermittent presence of cars parked on it would unacceptably erode the openness of the Green Belt. As parked cars would be expected to be there for several hours at a time on around 200 occasions in each year, this would cause significant harm to the Green Belt. It would be contrary to the Framework.
11. Moreover, the car park would be sited in the field that is beyond the limits of the existing buildings at Beddlestead Farm. Because this field contributes positively to the rural character of the Green Belt, and cars parked within it would be out of keeping with its character, and they would look incongruous in

the countryside, the proposal would encroach into the countryside. As one of the 5 purposes of Green Belts is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, the car park would be contrary to this Green Belt purpose. This would cause great harm to the Green Belt, contrary to the Framework.

12. Because the intermittent presence of cars parked within the car park would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt, and because the siting of the car park would conflict with one of the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, this part of the proposal would amount to inappropriate development. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. Thus, the proposal would cause substantial harm to the Green Belt. It would be contrary to the Framework, and LP Policies DP10 and DP13.

Any other harm

Countryside character

13. The site is within an area of attractive rolling countryside, which is designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value in the Development Plan. It provides a buffer that protects the views to and from the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to roughly south. Whilst it does not attract the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it contributes positively to the rural character of the area due to its visual qualities and its relative tranquillity.
14. Some noise and activity would be caused by the comings and goings of guests, deliveries, and associated vehicles. However, the car park would be a reasonable distance from Beddlestead Lane and the nearby dwelling at Culverkeys Cottage and most of the noise and activity related to the use would be within existing buildings. Having regard to the likely noise and activity from agricultural use, subject to the imposition of planning conditions to control the management of the venue and to mitigate noise breakout within and by the buildings, the fairly tranquil character in the countryside and the living conditions of the nearby occupiers would not be materially harmed. Users of the public right of way to roughly west of the site would be aware of activity within the site at times, and it could be out of keeping with the rural character, but its transient impact on their travels would not be sufficient reason to refuse the scheme.
15. The proposed landscape screening, including the semi-mature plants suggested by the appellant, might be in keeping with the occasional woodland blocks in the locality. However, having regard to the downward fall in the land towards the lane, it could take several years for suitable planting to develop sufficiently to effectively screen parked cars throughout the year. As this landscape screen could not reasonably be controlled by condition for more than a few years, and no other mechanism to control it in the longer term has been put to me, it could not be relied upon to screen the car parking area. When cars are parked there, they would look harmfully out of place within the rural landscape. This harm would not be overcome by finishing all of the car parking spaces, but not the main aisle, with grass, as suggested by the appellant.
16. Therefore, I consider that the proposal would cause significant harm to the rural character of the surrounding countryside. It would be contrary to Policy CSP18 of the *Tandridge District Core Strategy* (CS) which seeks respect for the local context, CS Policy CSP21 which seeks to protect the character and

distinctiveness of the District's landscapes, LP Policy DP7 which aims for development to integrate successfully with its surroundings, reinforcing landscape character, and the Framework which aims to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Sustainable pattern of travel

17. CS Policy CSP1 sets out the settlement hierarchy for the District and seeks for development to be located where sustainable patterns of travel can be achieved. This is broadly in line with the Framework aim to actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling. LP Policy DP1 is not directly relevant here because it reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development in the Framework, which aims to achieve sustainable development in its wider sense, by taking account of its economic, social and environmental roles.
18. Due to its rural location, the site is remote from key services and local facilities. It is roughly 7.9 km from the nearest rail station at Oxted, and roughly 6.6 km from the nearest tram stop at New Addington. Local bus services, which would also require a roughly 2 km walk to the site, are fairly few and infrequent. However, the buildings and their surroundings are where they are, and the environmental qualities of the listed buildings and their attractive countryside settings would be important to the proposal's potential economic success.
19. Whilst the site can only be reached by narrow country lanes, which are unlit and which have no footpaths, having regard to the likely attire for weddings and civil ceremonies, guests would not be likely to walk or cycle to or from the venue, especially during inclement weather or after dark. Instead, such trips would be made by motor vehicles, including private cars, taxis or minibuses.
20. The appellant's transport representations explain when most trips would be likely to happen, that measures including car sharing and use of minibuses could reduce the number of trips, and it includes specific arrangements to reduce the potential for conflicting vehicle movements in the narrow country lanes. It also explains how the travel movements of staff and deliveries could be accommodated. Such arrangements could be subject to a travel plan, which could be secured by condition if the proposal were to be otherwise acceptable. This would be in line with the Framework, which recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary from urban to rural areas. Moreover, Framework paragraph 10 explains that decisions need to take local circumstances into account, so that they respond to the different opportunities for achieving sustainable development in different areas. As a travel plan could help to achieve that aim, the proposal would satisfy LP Policy DP1 and the Framework.
21. The highway authority says that the site's location is not ideal for the use, but it has not objected to the scheme in terms of highway safety or highway capacity. Having regard to the former agricultural use of some of the buildings and their rural surroundings, I see no reason to disagree. Five of my colleagues' appeal decisions have been put to me. However, as all of the proposals before my colleagues would result in one or more new dwellings, and the house and Forge Cottage exist, they are not relevant to this proposal.
22. I consider that the proposal would not contribute to a sustainable pattern of development. It would be contrary to CS Policy CSP1. However, because a

travel plan could be secured by condition, and this would considerably mitigate the harm that would be caused, the weight afforded to this matter is little.

Other considerations

23. The other considerations put to me by the appellant include that the proposal, would create a number of jobs, and that it should provide some support for local suppliers of goods and services. Guests attending ceremonies would also be likely to support local businesses including restaurants, public houses, accommodation providers, and taxi companies. So, the proposal, which would re-use some presently underused rural buildings, would support the growth of the rural economy. This matter attracts moderate weight.
24. However, there is little evidence to show that Beddlestead House would not remain in use as a house, or that the listed barn would be put at risk, or that their settings would be damaged, if the appeal were to fail. Thus, there is little to suggest that the proposal would be necessary to preserve either of the listed buildings or their settings, which it is desirable to preserve. This matter attracts almost no weight.

Green Belt balance

25. I have found that the proposal would amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and the substantial harm by reason of inappropriateness, significant harm due to the loss of Green Belt openness, great harm to one of the purposes of including land in Green Belts, the significant harm to the rural character of the countryside, and the little harm due to the failure to achieve a sustainable pattern of development, together add up to considerable harm. Taken together, the other considerations in this case, which include the moderate weight given to support for the growth of the rural economy, and almost no weight afforded to the preservation of the listed buildings and their settings, are insufficient to clearly outweigh the considerable harm that I have found. Therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. The proposal would be contrary to CS Policies CSP1, CSP18 and CSP21, LP Policies DP7, DP10 and DP13, and the Framework.

Conclusion

26. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal fails.

Joanna Reid

INSPECTOR