
Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 12 October 2016

Site visit made on 12 October 2016

by Claire Victory BA (Hons) BPI MRTPI

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

Decision date: 20 December 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/R0335/W/16/3151233

**Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club, North Street, Winkfield, Windsor
SL4 4TH**

- 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 Greta Morrison against the decision of Bracknell Forest Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 14/00826/FUL/RFULZ, dated 17 July 2014, was refused by notice dated 2 December 2015.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 24 stables with associated food and tack stores, accommodation for grooms and manager, to provide for high goal ponies at Club, following demolition of existing barn.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in the appeal are:
 - Whether the development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness and purposes of the Green Belt;
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - If the proposal is inappropriate development, whether the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriate development, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify it.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

3. Paragraph 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate development within the Green Belt, subject to certain exceptions, including the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sports and recreation. Policy GB1 (ii) of the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan (LP)
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(2002) requires building for outdoor sport and recreation to be essential, reflecting advice in the former PPG2: Green Belts, but national planning policy as set out in the Framework does not contain this requirement, merely requiring the facility to be appropriate. There is no definition within the Framework as to what constitutes an appropriate facility, and therefore it is a matter of judgement based on the circumstances of any given case.

4. The proposed building would comprise 24 stables, 2 tack rooms and 2 feed rooms, accommodation for 5 grooms and living accommodation for a site manager, all within a single detached building located within the south west corner of the Polo Club complex. There would also be a manager's office and a meeting room.
5. The club has been established for many years, and there has been significant investment recently, including an all-weather Winter Arena, an all-weather exercise track and additional polo fields. The current stables are at 100% capacity during the playing season with about 75% occupancy during the winter. Some 20 temporary stables have been provided. The documents submitted with the planning application also showed a marquee as temporary stabling but the appellant has advised that this was for corporate events. This evidence is persuasive that additional capacity is required, and the proposed stables and ancillary facilities are appropriate for a club of this size and stature.
6. However, the proposed site managers dwelling forms a significant element of the scheme, and the mix of facilities for outdoor sport and residential means that the proposal would not meet any of the exceptions set out in paragraph 89 of the Framework. The associated groom's accommodation also does not readily fall within the definition of "facilities" but even if it was treated as such the building as a whole would not do so given the inclusion of a dwelling. I therefore conclude that the development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Openness and purposes

7. The proposed stables would be somewhat larger than the barn it would replace. As such there would be some harm to openness. However, the development of a slightly larger building in place of the existing barn and in a broadly similar location would not have a significant effect on the purposes of keeping the Green Belt permanently open and there would be no coalescence between built up areas.

Character and appearance

8. The building would be set back from Pigeonhouse Lane and mature trees and shrubs directly to its south along the lane would provide some screening. However, the open polo field to the east and post and rail fencing along the southern boundary, to the east of the vehicular access from Pigeonhouse Lane means that it would be more visible in more distant views when approaching site from that direction.
9. On the other hand, the existing barn is already visible, and the building would be seen in the context of the two storey Orsett House to the west. It would be predominantly single storey with some living accommodation at first floor level within the roofspace at one end for the site managers dwelling, and the

appearance would be that of a barn. Additional landscaping within the site would assist in softening the appearance of the proposal.

10. The proposed building would be sited about 700m from the main group of buildings within the Polo Club. Normally grouping buildings together would be the preferred approach in a rural location rather than adding further built form elsewhere, but the visual impact of the proposal would be relatively modest. In these particular circumstances I consider the position of the proposed development away from the main complex to be acceptable.
11. I have also had regard to the earlier planning permission in 1990 for 28 ponies, 4 tack rooms and accommodation for 5 grooms. Drawing 21305-1 03 shows that this would be of a similar footprint to the proposal subject of this appeal, but sited slightly further to the east. I give some weight to the fact that the Council considered a building of a similar scale and location to that proposed was acceptable, albeit this is limited given the time that has elapsed since the permission was granted.
12. For all of the above reasons I conclude that the proposed development would not harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area, and would accord with LP policy EN20. This requires development to be appropriate in mass, scale, design, materials, layout and siting, and in relation to adjoining buildings, spaces and views.

Other considerations

13. Other considerations weighing in favour of the proposal must clearly outweigh any harm identified. Firstly in relation to economic considerations, whilst a Site Manager role is proposed, the application form indicates that there would be no additional staff employed as a result of the proposal. As such it is unclear whether there would be any direct economic benefits arising from increased employment on site. Nonetheless, the appellant has stated that the proposed self-contained facility would be attractive to visiting teams, enabling it to cater for high goal ponies and teams and create additional income for the club.
14. In addition it is evident¹ that the Polo Club makes a contribution to the local economy as part of the supply chain supporting local businesses including vets, food suppliers, and farriers. This is in accordance with paragraph 21 of the Framework, which recognises the need to support existing business sectors. I also saw evidence of recent investment in the club by the owners, with the construction of the Winter Arena, and new polo fields under construction at the time of the site visit. I have given moderate weight to these economic considerations.
15. Turning to the residential element of the scheme, the appellant asserts that there is an essential need for a managers dwelling. LP Policy H5 states that outside defined settlement boundaries the erection of new dwellings will not be permitted unless it is for an acceptable use listed in LP Policies EN8 or GB1. However, these policies predate the Framework, which states at paragraph 55 that new isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided, unless they are for an essential need, for example to accommodate a rural worker at or near their place of work in the countryside.

¹ Equestrian Assessment – Kernan Countryside Consultants Ltd (July 2015)

16. The appellant maintains that in earlier correspondence the Council accepted in principle the need for a manager's dwelling, but challenged the proposed location remote from the existing complex of buildings. Notwithstanding this, the Council does not accept there is a need for an additional rural workers dwelling as there is already one within the main complex.
17. The Planning Statement submitted with the application notes that to date site management arrangements have been ad-hoc, and a formal system is now required. The Site Manager would have responsibility for the whole club, including all facilities, security, overall health and safety and welfare of people and horses. It also stated that there is currently no-one that is always on site after 6pm. The Site Manager would oversee other staff including the Polo Manager and assistant Polo Manager.
18. However, there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding the respective responsibilities of the proposed Site Manager and other staff. For example the Polo Manager would have some supervisory responsibility for the teams and ponies, and there also appears to be an overlap between the Event Manager and the Site Manager in meeting and looking after visiting teams.
19. The parties' also dispute whose responsibility it would be to care for ponies out of hours or in case of an emergency. The appellant has stated that grooms are responsible for their horses but that they are not always on site. I am doubtful that owners would wish to leave high value horses unsupervised, and in any event, it is reasonable to expect that one of the five grooms would be available to deal with any emergency including the welfare of horses. The evidence is that there is a shortage of grooms' accommodation. Indeed, I accept that there is a functional need for this to be on site and give it some weight as a benefit of the scheme.
20. On the other hand, it is not entirely obvious that there is an essential need for a Site Manager to live at or near their place of work even though this would be likely to be more convenient. In any case, there is an existing building occupied as a permanent residential dwelling within the Polo Club. Greys Lodge, fronting North Street is a small cottage used as permanent living accommodation, with an adjacent outbuilding used as an office. At the Hearing I heard that this would continue to be occupied by the appellant's son in his role as club Chairman (formerly the Event Manager). It is not clear why this dwelling could not be occupied by a Site Manager or what purpose having a second dwelling on the site would serve. Consequently, I am not convinced of the need for an additional permanent unit of accommodation for the Site Manager.
21. Further justification for the provision of a site manager's dwelling is to provide security given the high value of the ponies being stabled in the building. However, supervision could be provided by any one of the 5 grooms on site. Furthermore, the appellant advised that there is currently no security system on site. Remote security measures including closed circuit television and alarms could be considered and operated from the existing permanent dwelling.
22. There is a need to compete with other clubs such as Flemish Farm and Guards Club, which have an on-site manager, albeit I heard that such arrangements have been in place for some time and do not have the benefit of express

- planning permission. Furthermore as I have noted above there is already an existing permanent dwelling on site.
23. The appellant avers that a house anywhere on the site would have an impact on the Green Belt, and that the size of the dwelling has been reduced from that shown in the previous application, pre-application discussions, and revised planning application. Nevertheless, for the reasons set out above, I conclude that the enterprise does not justify the proposed manager's dwelling, and thus give this consideration limited weight.
24. The Council consider that alternative locations are available within the wider Polo Club site. Firstly it is suggested that the barn to be demolished, also referred to as Walter's Barn, could be utilised for the appeal proposal. The appellant has stated that the barn is in poor condition and currently in use for stabling during the main polo season and storage of machinery during the winter, and no compelling evidence has been provided to the contrary. Thus I find that it would not be a suitable alternative.
25. There are some existing offices and meeting rooms within the main building fronting North Street, but the individual rooms are quite small and appeared at the site visit to be largely occupied by existing staff. Furthermore it is doubtful that meetings for both home and visiting teams could be hosted within this existing accommodation.
26. The area to the north of the Winter Arena is relatively limited in size, adjacent to a public footpath and lacks a direct vehicular access. In addition, locating a building of the size proposed between the practice field and the aforementioned area is likely to encroach upon the area for pony lines.
27. Finally, the area between the pavilion and the clubhouse is used during the summer months for hospitality and due to likely noise levels in that location would not be suitable for stabling high goal ponies that require a calm environment². Moreover, I saw at the site visit that other areas of the wider Polo Club are being used for the creation of additional polo fields. I am therefore satisfied that other all potential alternative options for the location of the proposed development have been considered and discounted. This adds moderate weight in favour of the proposal.

Other Matters

28. There was some concern that the proposed stables and site manager's accommodation could be occupied separately from the rest of the Polo Club, particularly given the distance from the main complex and existence of a separate vehicular access. However this could be prevented, if the proposal was otherwise acceptable, by the imposition of a condition requiring the building to be occupied only in association with the Polo Club as identified by the blue line on the site plan.
29. Concerns were also raised by the occupiers of the adjacent Orsett House regarding the potential for noise and disturbance from the proposed stables, a loss of open views, and increased security risk from the stabling of high value horses. However, the loss of a private view is not a planning matter, and I consider there is sufficient separation from Orsett House, incorporating screening by mature trees along the western boundary of the appeal site, to

² Ref. Letter from Hurlingham Polo Association dated 24 March 2015

avoid unacceptable noise and disturbance. Finally, security arrangements on the appeal site are a matter for the Polo Club to consider.

Conclusion

30. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as defined by the Framework. It would, therefore be harmful to the Green Belt. I have given this harm substantial weight, in accordance with paragraph 88 of the Framework. There would also be some limited harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
31. I have given moderate weight to needs of the business to attract new polo players and teams through the provision of new facilities as well as further accommodation for grooms, and the lack of alternative options for the location of the proposal within the site. However I have also found that there is not an essential need for a site manager's dwelling. I conclude that taken, together, the other considerations do not clearly outweigh the harm that the development would cause. Accordingly, there are not the very special circumstances necessary to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Furthermore, the proposal would not accord with the development plan as a whole.
32. For the reasons I have set out above, the appeal should be dismissed.

Claire Victory

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Christian Leigh	Leigh and Glennie Ltd
Tony Kernon	Kernon Countryside Consultants Ltd
Greta Morrison	Appellant
Jamie Morrison	Chairman, Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club
Michael Amooore	General Manager, Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club

FOR THE COUNCIL:

Paul Corbett	Senior Planning Officer, Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Richard Brogden	Bruton Knowles Consultants

INTERESTED PERSONS:

Moira Gaw	Ward Councillor
Barinder Hothi	Local Resident

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED AT THE HEARING

- 1 Copies of planning policies referred to in Appellant's statement
- 2 Appeal Decision at Royal Berkshire Fishery (Ref. APP/R0335/A/08/2084301) submitted by Appellant