
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 January 2017

by Thomas Hatfield BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 2nd February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/A0665/W/16/3159374

The Tudor Rose, Parkgate Road, Puddington, Chester CH66 9PD

- 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 Premier Inn Hotels Ltd against the decision of Cheshire West & Chester Council.
 - The application Ref 16/01756/FUL, dated 27 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 28 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is an extension to existing hotel to provide an additional 22 bedrooms with associated alterations to car parking and landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The appellant is given above as 'Premier Inn Hotels Ltd', which is taken from the appeal form. This differs slightly from the spelling provided on the application form ('Premier Inn Hotel Ltd'), but that appears to be a typographical error.
3. The site has been subject to a previous dismissed appeal (ref APP/A0665/W/15/3139595) for an extension to the hotel to provide 27 additional bedrooms. That development would have occupied a similar footprint to the current proposal, but with a greater floorspace at second floor level. Given the similarities between the developments, and the date of the previous decision (17 March 2016), I attach significant weight to the previous Inspector's findings.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - (a) Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework ("the Framework") and development plan policy;
 - (b) The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, and;
 - (c) If the proposal is inappropriate development, 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.
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Reasons

Inappropriate development in Green Belt

5. The appeal site is located at the end of a short row of commercial premises on the south western side of Parkgate Road. It contains an existing hotel and public house, with car parking to the side and rear. At present, the hotel contains 31 bedrooms and is predominantly 2 storeys in height at the front with a 3 storey wing projecting to the rear. The development would introduce a large extension that would connect to the existing three storey wing of the building.
6. Paragraph 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') states that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions. One such exception is the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
7. The submitted planning history for the site is incomplete, although the existing 3-storey wing appears to be an addition to the original Tudor Rose pub. In any event, the proposed extension would be a substantial addition to the current building, both in terms of its volume and footprint. Given its size and scale, I consider that it would be a 'disproportionate addition'. Furthermore, it would not be a partial redevelopment of a previously developed site in the terms presented at the sixth bullet point at paragraph 89 of the Framework.
8. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which paragraph 87 of the Framework states is harmful by definition and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The proposal would also be contrary to Policy STRAT 9 of the Cheshire West & Chester Local Plan (Part 1) Strategic Policies (2015) (the Local Plan) which requires the expansion of established businesses in the Green Belt to be proportionate to the nature and scale of the site and its setting.

Openness

9. The extension would be located on land that is currently used for car parking. Whilst this largely consists of hardstanding, it is otherwise free from development above ground level. The introduction of a large extension with a significant built footprint and volume would clearly reduce the openness of this part of the Green Belt. The Framework advises at paragraph 79 that openness is an essential characteristic of Green Belts, and the appeal proposal would therefore cause harm in this regard.
10. Whilst the development would be partially screened from view by the existing hotel building and landscaping, it would still be visible from Parkgate Road. In any event, this consideration would not alter the loss of openness associated with the proposal. In view of these points, I conclude that the appeal proposal would fail to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. This would further harm the objectives of the Green Belt to which the government attaches significant importance.

Other considerations

11. It has been put to me that the development would be consistent with the Framework's support for economic growth, and the presumption in favour of

sustainable development. In this respect, detailed information has been submitted regarding the need for additional hotel accommodation in the area. In particular, evidence of current high occupancy rates and unfulfilled requests have been provided, although I share the previous Inspector's reservations about using the number of website clicks that do not result in a booking to measure a 'turndown' due to non-availability. The development would also create new jobs and would involve significant investment. Other nearby hotels in the same chain are already undergoing expansion and the appellant states that they cannot accommodate further expansion, although there is no evidence before me to confirm this.

12. Local Plan Policy STRAT 9 supports development which is of a suitable scale and type for its location. However, the appeal site is outside any defined settlement boundary and is in the Green Belt. Inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which would also reduce openness, cannot be said to be of a suitable scale and type for its location. Nor would it be sustainable in terms of the environmental role of sustainable development set out in the Framework. The criteria in Local Plan Policy ECON 3 are also clearly subject to the additional controls that apply in the Green Belt.
13. The appellant states that any extension must exceed a tipping point beyond which the economies of scale justify the extension being undertaken. In this regard, the proposal would make use of existing facilities at the site, such as the reception, restaurant, security, and car park, which would need to be provided in a new hotel. This would avoid land acquisition costs, and the appellant states that it would assist the viability of the project and help to keep the hotel rooms at budget level. However, whilst there may be a business case for expanding the hotel, that does not serve to justify inappropriate development in Green Belt.
14. The appellant further states that a standalone 22 bedroom hotel would be unviable. However, even if that were the case, that does not mean that the accommodation needs of the area could not be met by a larger development in another location.
15. In terms of the support that would be provided for local tourism, I note that both Chester and Liverpool are located some distance away. The site is also not in a particularly accessible location, being more than 2km from the nearest station, and guests would be heavily reliant on use of the private car. Reference has also been made to the Good Practice Guidance for Planning for Tourism. However, this document has now been withdrawn and is no longer current Government guidance.
16. Whilst the appeal site contains an existing building and is within a short row of commercial properties, that situation is not unusual in Green Belt. It does not diminish the Green Belt status of the land, or lessen the inappropriateness of the proposed development. In addition, whilst the site would not result in the outward expansion of Ellesmere Port, Neston, or Chester, the restriction of sprawl is just one of the purposes of including land in Green Belt. Furthermore, there is no evidence before me to show that the development would prevent the loss of other Green Belt land to hotel development, and no specific examples have been brought to my attention in this regard.
17. The current proposal differs from that considered by the previous Inspector, and proposes 22 rather than 27 bedrooms. This has resulted in a reduction in

floorspace compared to the previous scheme that is particularly apparent at second floor level. The appellant states that this has resulted in a 27% reduction in floorspace. However, the reduction in built volume would be smaller as the floorspace measurement does not include the volume of the pitched roof. In any event, the proposed reduction in size would not, in my view, result in a development where the benefits would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

Other Matters

18. Whilst the development would not harm the visual amenity of local residents, this is an ordinary requirement for new development. It represents an absence of harm rather than a positive benefit. Similarly, the lack of objections to the development from local residents is a neutral consideration.

Conclusion

19. The proposal would constitute inappropriate development in Green Belt and would reduce openness in this location. The Framework states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. Even when taken together, the other considerations in this case do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. The development would therefore be contrary to Policy STRAT 9 of the Local Plan, and guidance contained in the Framework.
20. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Thomas Hatfield

INSPECTOR