The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 June 2018

by Thomas Hatfield BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 5 July 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/Q4245/W/18/3195018
Ashton on Mersey Golf Clubhouse, 126 Church Lane, Sale, M33 5QQ

- 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 Kris Andrews against the decision of Trafford Borough Council.
- The application Ref 91469/FUL/17, dated 14 October 2016, was refused by notice dated 29 August 2017.
- The development proposed is retention of a single storey, free-standing, timber clad warm up room, adjacent to the clubhouse. Installation of planters for screening purposes.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The description of development given above is taken from the Council's Decision Notice, as this provides a more concise description than the one given on the planning application form.

3. The development has already been constructed and the appeal is therefore retrospective in nature.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:

   (a) Whether the proposal is 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;

   (c) The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area; and

   (d) 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.

Reasons

Inappropriate development in Green Belt

5. Paragraph 89 of 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 provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, so long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

6. The appeal development comprises a single storey timber building that contains an indoor golf simulator. The appellant states that it is intended to be used as a warm up facility by patrons of the golf club, although at the time of my site visit the existing warm up area and nets remained in situ nearby. A pricelist was also positioned inside the appeal building offering various packages of lessons and virtual rounds of golf that could be played on the simulator. The building's connection with the adjoining golf course is therefore unclear. Moreover, the relevant exception at paragraph 89 of the Framework applies only to *"appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation"* (my emphasis). In this case, the proposal is for an entirely indoor facility that, on the evidence before me, appears to have a tenuous relationship with the outdoor golf course. Accordingly, the development does not meet the relevant exception at Paragraph 89 of the Framework.

7. My attention has been drawn to 3 appeal decisions that relate to proposals for golf facilities in the Green Belt. The full details of those cases are not before me. However, I note that 2 of these decisions[1] were for partly open structures (a driving range and golf practice shelters) that were clearly used for outdoor sport. The third case[2], which was determined prior to the publication of the Framework, proposed a golf teaching and practice facility, which is not the case here. I have therefore come to my own view on the appeal development rather than relying on the approach taken by my colleagues in different circumstances.

8. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal is 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 is also contrary to Policy R4 of the Trafford Core Strategy (2012), which seeks to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development.

Openness

9. The development has introduced additional built footprint and volume onto land that was previously open. It is also clearly visible from the adjoining golf course and from Church Lane. The development therefore results in a reduction in openness to 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 therefore causes harm in this regard.

10. I conclude that the appeal proposal fails to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. This further harms the objectives of the Green Belt to which the Government attaches significant importance.

[1] APP/K3415/A/11/2153458 and APP/W0340/A/12/2171289
[2] APP//J1535/A/11/2146888

Character and appearance

11. The appeal building has a box-like shape and is constructed in timber, which had been stained dark brown at the time of my site visit. It is positioned next to a well-used path that connects the golf course to the car park.

12. The building has a somewhat functional appearance with a different shape and materials to neighbouring buildings. However, it is relatively small in size and has a subservient appearance next to the taller brick buildings. Its colour ensures that it does not unduly stand out. It could also be partially screened in views from the car park and Church Lane by planters. In these circumstances, I do not consider that the development significantly harms the character and appearance of the area. It therefore accords with Policy R4 of the Trafford Core Strategy (2012), which seeks to ensure, amongst other things, that new development should be appropriate in its context.

Other considerations

13. The appellant states that the development provides enhanced sporting facilities that can be used during wet weather. However, given its size, it is only able to accommodate a small number of players at a time, and so any wet weather benefit would be limited. Moreover, there is no evidence before me that it has helped to attract new members to the club since it began operating.

14. Whilst the development is seen in the context of existing taller buildings, it is still be prominent from the nearby path and results in a loss of openness.

Conclusion

15. The proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt and has reduced 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 outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. The development is therefore contrary to Policy R4 of the Trafford Core Strategy (2012), and guidance contained in the Framework.

16. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Thomas Hatfield

INSPECTOR