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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 June 2019

**by Benjamin Webb BA(Hons) MA MA MSc PGDip(UD) MRTPI IHBC**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 25 July 2019**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/D3640/W/19/3223129**

**81 Queens Road, Bisley, Woking GU24 9AS**

- 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 T Connors against the decision of Surrey Heath Borough Council.
  - The application Ref 18/0794, dated 4 September 2018, was refused by notice dated 26 November 2018.
  - The development proposed is erection of a detached 3 bed dwelling.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Procedural Matter

2. The absence of a financial contribution towards site access management and monitoring measures required to mitigate the effects of the development on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, was a reason for refusal of planning permission. The Council has indicated that the required contribution has since been paid and has therefore withdrawn this objection. Had I been minded to allow this appeal it would nonetheless have been necessary for me to seek further information in relation to this matter. As I have concluded that the appeal should be dismissed on other grounds, it will not be necessary for me to consider this matter further.

### Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
  - whether the development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
  - the effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt;
  - the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area; and
  - if the development is inappropriate, whether 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 it.

## Reasons

### *Whether Inappropriate Development*

4. The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt. It consists of a single storey bungalow on a large plot with a frontage on Queens Road. The proposed development would entail splitting the plot and construction of a chalet bungalow and garage.
5. Paragraph 145(e) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is not inappropriate where it would involve limited infilling in villages.
6. Given that the proposed development would occupy what is clearly a gap between 2 dwellings, and would itself consist of a single dwelling and garage, each of modest size, it is reasonable to conclude that the development would involve limited infilling.
7. The site falls approximately 420 metres outside the settlement boundary of Bisley, as defined for development plan purposes. The Council however acknowledges that the Courts have indicated that this is not a sole defining criterion with regard to establishing whether or not a site falls within a village, and that various considerations will be relevant.
8. 81 Queens Road forms part of a ribbon of mixed residential development. Adjacent to the appeal site this ribbon principally consists of single storey bungalows and 2-storey terraced dwellings, which stand in reasonably large plots, at varying distances from the road frontage. The layout as a whole lacks significant depth, and the dwellings exhibit a generally suburban character.
9. This ribbon does not directly adjoin what is appreciably the built-up area of Bisley, but is separated from it by a substantial area of woodland. There is furthermore limited inter-visibility between the ribbon and the fringe of the built-up area to the east. After a modest break, the ribbon itself continues further west along Queens Road, extending some distance into the rural landscape. The prevailing impression is therefore one of sporadic development along Queens Road, which, with regard to its location beyond the edge of the built-up area of Bisley, has the distinct character of sprawl.
10. The appellant draws attention to the compact nature, density and strong urban character of development along Queens Road, and the fact that the gap between the easternmost dwelling in the ribbon, and outlying development at the edge of Bisley to the west falls to a minimum of around 160 metres. This does not however alter the impression that the site is located within, a ribbon of development which is distinctly separate from the built-up area of Bisley.
11. Based on what I have seen and read, the site does not lie within a village and the exception set out in paragraph 145(e) of the Framework is not applicable.
12. I conclude therefore that the proposal would represent inappropriate development, which is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. Paragraph 144 of the Framework indicates that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt.

### *Openness*

13. The proposed development would entail construction of a building where there is currently none. This would, as a matter of fact, erode the openness of the Green Belt.
14. The proposed dwelling would be clearly visible from Queens Road. Given that it would be more bulky than the dwellings to either side, and its construction would increase frontage density, the loss of openness would be appreciable visually. On account of the established developed context however, the resulting harm to the openness of the Green Belt would be modest.
15. I conclude therefore that the proposal would cause moderate harm due to loss of openness within the Green Belt. This would be contrary to the fundamental aim of Green Belt designation set out in Paragraph 133 of the Framework. I attach substantial weight to this harm.

### *Character and Appearance*

16. No 81 forms one of a row of single storey bungalows of varied design, but generally similar height and proportion. As a group the row therefore exhibits a strong degree of visual consistency within the street scene.
17. The proposed dwelling would be similarly positioned within its plot to those either side. It would however be a chalet bungalow, as opposed to a single storey bungalow, and the provision of accommodation within the roof space would require a noticeably higher eaves line than the dwellings either side, and substantial gable features at front and back. The dwelling would have a substantially greater overall mass and bulk with a starkly contrasting roof form to those either side, notwithstanding the fact that it would be of similar height. These differences would be visually emphasised by the relatively small gaps between the proposed dwelling and its neighbours. The degree of visual inconsistency would cause it to appear incongruous within the street scene.
18. Trees are visible beyond the site, and the open, rural character of the broader setting of development along Queens Road is clearly appreciable from the street frontage. This contrasts with the suburban character of existing development within the ribbon itself, including the site, which though open, is covered by gravel. In this context the development would result in the further consolidation of built-form within the ribbon, and thus the further suburbanisation of its rural setting. This would serve to reinforce the existing sense of intrusion of development into the rural landscape outside Bisley.
19. Whilst I note that a prison is located to the north, this is not visible from the site and does not adjoin or form part of the ribbon. As such it has little bearing on the character or appearance of the immediate setting of the site.
20. For the reasons outlined above I conclude that the development would have an unacceptably adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area. It would as such conflict with Policy DM9 of the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2011-2028 adopted February 2012, which amongst other things seeks to secure development that respects and enhances the character of the environment be it in an urban or rural setting; and the Framework. I attach substantial weight to the harm that would be caused. Though the Council also quoted principles 7.4 and 7.8 of the Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2017 in its decision, neither is particularly

relevant to the matters outlined above, given that principle 7.4 relates to consistency in building spacing, height and footprint, and principle 7.8 to the use of architectural detailing.

#### *Other Considerations*

21. The Council acknowledges, and the appellant highlights, the fact that the Council cannot demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites. In this context, the development would provide one additional dwelling that would help towards meeting the Council's housing requirements. The fact that the contribution would amount only to a single dwelling would however mean that the benefit was very limited. I therefore attach limited weight to this consideration.
22. The appellant states that the development would make efficient use of the site. Paragraph 122 of the Framework indeed states that decisions should support such development, but nonetheless draws attention to the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting. In view of my reasons above therefore, the efficient use of land is a consideration to which I attach limited weight.

#### **Planning Balance and Conclusion**

23. The proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and would also cause moderate harm due to loss of openness. These are matters of harm to which I afford substantial weight, in addition to the substantial weight I have attached to harm that would be caused to the character and appearance of the area.
24. The other considerations referred to by the appellant carry limited weight in favour of the proposal, which is insufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, and harm to the character and appearance of the area considered in combination. As such, harm caused by the proposal would not be clearly outweighed by other considerations, and therefore the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. Therefore I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

*Benjamin Webb*

INSPECTOR