
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 August 2019

by Andrew Smith BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 August 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/W/19/3228555

The Glen, Mill Lane, Pirbright, Woking GU24 0BN

- 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 C McKie against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 18/P/02143, dated 7 November 2018, was refused by notice dated 2 January 2019.
 - The development proposed is creation of a 2m high, profiled and grass-seeded security bund around existing southern entrance to yard to form means of enclosure from fields to prevent unauthorised access and theft, including native hedge planting on outer slope.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. It is apparent from the evidence before me and from my own inspection that the proposed bund has already been created at the site. I shall consider the appeal on this basis whilst noting that, for the avoidance of doubt, it is my responsibility is to consider the appeal based on the scheme as it appears on the plans submitted.
3. Since the determination of the planning application that is now the subject of this appeal, the Guildford Borough Local Plan: Strategy and Sites 2015-2034 (the new Local Plan) has been adopted by the Council and the policies therein can now be afforded full weight in decision making. The main parties, following this adoption, have had the opportunity to make representations with respect to any implications for this appeal.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - Whether or not the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
 - The effect upon the character of the area; and
 - If the proposal were to be inappropriate development, whether or not the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether or not inappropriate development

5. The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) (the Framework) sets out that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. Certain forms of development, including engineering operations, are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
6. The bund has been constructed at the edge of an equestrian yard that contains various equipment, containers and storage areas. On its opposing outer edges, the bund sits alongside a large grassed field (the field). When viewed from various viewpoints across the field, the bund, which is approximately 2m in height, forms a visible feature. Indeed, it provides an abrupt rise in land level immediately adjacent to the natural gentle slope of the field.
7. The existing grass/low-level planting, which covers much of the bund's top and slopes, assists to some extent in softening the visual appearance of the bund and in promoting that it blends in with its natural surroundings. It remains the case however that the bund is readily distinguishable and appears as an unnatural addition to the landscape. This would be the case even were the bund to be newly grass-seeded to closely replicate, in terms of its surface appearance, the adjacent grassed field.
8. I note that the appellant has referred to the bund being partly screened by new hedging to its eastern slope. However, this hedging only screens a part of the bund. In any event, landscaping cannot be relied upon to provide a solid and permanent buffer to views. This is because planting is ever evolving, is reliant on regular maintenance to retain a consistent form and may be reduced in scale or extent in the future.
9. The proposal thus fails to preserve the Green Belt's openness and would therefore be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and, in this regard, it would conflict with Policy P2 of the new Local Plan in so far as it states that the Metropolitan Green Belt will continue to be protected against inappropriate development in accordance with the Framework.

Character of the area

10. Whilst I have found that the bund is readily distinguishable and appears as an unnatural addition to the landscape, I note that it is of relatively limited height and expanse. It is also, when viewed across the field from southern vantage points, seen against the backdrop of an equestrian operation and associated built form.
11. Notwithstanding that the bund fails to preserve the Green Belt's openness, I consider that, due to its siting and relatively modest scale and extent, it does not appear as an unduly prominent physical feature. Thus, it has an acceptable effect upon the character of the area and does not cause harm in this context. The proposal accords with saved Policy G5(9) of the Guildford Borough Local Plan (2003) and with Policy D1 of the new Local Plan in so far as these policies require that new development integrates into the existing townscape and landscape.

Other matter

12. I note that it has been alleged by an interested party that an extension of the yard area (which sits adjacent to the bund) has been carried out and that unlawful activity could be taking place. For the avoidance of doubt, this is a matter of limited relevance to this appeal. This is particularly when noting the description of development under consideration and the tightly drawn nature of the red line extent of the appeal site.

Whether very special circumstances exist

13. The Framework sets out that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The appellant has referred to security benefits provided by the bund, which they state deters trespassers from entering the site. I acknowledge that the bund provides a benefit in this regard. However, it has not been clearly demonstrated that the risk in this particular rural location is unduly high, nor that potential alternative solutions, that may not require engineering operations to be undertaken, have been fully explored. The weight I have applied to this benefit is moderate therefore.
14. The above contribution does not clearly outweigh the significant harm identified to the Green Belt (including harm derived from loss of openness) so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development. The scheme before me conflicts with the development plan when read as a whole, and material considerations do not lead me to a decision otherwise.

Conclusion

15. For the above reasons, the appeal is dismissed.

Andrew Smith

INSPECTOR