



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 August 2019

by David Cross BA(Hons) PgDip(Dist) TechIOA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 September 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/X4725/W/19/3230202

Walton Driving Range, Common Lane, Walton, Wakefield WF2 6PS

- 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 B Rawlinson against the decision of City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00098/FUL, dated 11 January 2019, was refused by notice dated 10 May 2019.
 - The development proposed is residential development (5 dwellings) including demolition of existing buildings, cessation of commercial use and removal of associated infrastructure.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - Whether the development represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
 - The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - Whether, if the development is deemed inappropriate, 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 Inappropriate Development

3. The appeal site is part of a golf driving range located within the Green Belt. The proposed dwellings would be located in the approximate area of the club house, driving range building and hard-core surfaced car park/circulation area. Due to the permanent structures and associated fixed infrastructure, the appeal site therefore has the characteristics of previously developed land (PDL).
4. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as

inappropriate development unless it falls into one of a number of exceptions. These exceptions include the partial or complete redevelopment of PDL as long as this would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.

5. In respect of the effect on openness, I have had regard to the figures provided by the appellant in relation to a reduction in the overall volume and footprint of built development on the site and the reduction in maximum building height, as well as other factors. However, the appellant accepts that a purely mathematical approach would be too narrow and has also undertaken a more subjective contextual analysis supported by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA).
6. Whilst the proposed dwellings would be lower than the existing clubhouse, the dwellings would extend over a greater area than the clubhouse and they would be materially higher than the driving range building. The bulk and roofscape of the dwellings would also be apparent extending further to the west than the existing clubhouse and above the roofline of the driving range building, with subsequent harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
7. The degree of enclosure resulting from the rear gardens of the proposal as well as associated domestic paraphernalia would also be materially different from the appearance of the extant site. Although the hardstanding of the car park may cover an extensive area it has a relatively open appearance, even allowing for the parking and movement of vehicles. In contrast, the extent of the proposed dwellings and the degree of enclosure around the rear gardens would significantly change this appearance, to the detriment of openness.
8. The appellant refers to the consolidation of the built form to reduce projection to the east, south and west. However, this would be to a limited degree and would not outweigh the harm arising from the scale of the dwellings in comparison to the driving range building and the degree of enclosure.
9. I therefore conclude that the proposal would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt, and would therefore be inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and the Framework requires that substantial weight should be given to any harm.

Character and Appearance

10. The appeal site is located within an area of countryside which extends around the built up area of Wakefield. The area includes a mix of both rural and other features which are representative of countryside on the urban fringe e.g. power lines, transport infrastructure, minerals reclamation schemes and golf courses. Whilst these features diminish the rural quality of the landscape to a degree, the area has clearly retained a countryside character and appearance.
11. The existing buildings, hard surfaced areas and other features such as storage containers on the appeal site are of a relatively utilitarian appearance. The driving range area also introduces an element of clutter such as targets and range markers. The buildings and associated features on the site are not particularly attractive and their removal would be a benefit to this area. However, the appearance of the site including the associated buildings and infrastructure is representative of the function of the site as a golf driving

range. Such recreational uses are not uncommon within the countryside and the site does not appear as an unduly incongruous element in this area. Within that context I give the removal of the buildings etc. no more than moderate weight in favour of the proposal.

12. In contrast, the proposed group of detached dwellings set within individual plots around a cul-de-sac would appear as an isolated suburban enclave. This would be seen as an incongruous feature within this area of countryside which would not relate well to this site or any of the features in the vicinity.
13. The LVA contends that on balance the proposal would have a slight but beneficial effect on the character of the site and the wider area. However, this is based on an assessment that the proposed grouping of residential buildings reflects the arrangement of small farmsteads in the locality. I disagree with that assessment as, for the reasons stated previously, I consider that the proposal would result in an incongruous suburban form of development.
14. The site would be visible from both the highway of Common Lane as well as a nearby public footpath. Whilst views from Common Lane may be fleeting for drivers of passing vehicles, the obtrusive suburban nature of the development would be readily apparent even in such fleeting views. The appellant has referred to the potential for planting to screen the views of the development. However, this would take time to establish and in any event I am not persuaded that this would effectively screen the development in all views from the surrounding area.
15. On balance, whilst I acknowledge that the removal of the existing buildings and associated features on the site would be of moderate benefit, this would be outweighed by the substantial harm arising from the inappropriate design of the development to the detriment of the character and appearance of the area.

Other Considerations

16. The proposal would make a modest contribution to the supply of housing in the area, and I note that the parties agree that the site is in a sustainable location. However, due to the scale of the proposal, the contribution to housing supply would be limited and I therefore give this matter limited weight in favour of the appeal.
17. The construction of the proposal would also lead to employment and investment in the locality, although this would be to a limited degree and over a limited period of time. Whilst future residents may add to the support of services in the area, this would be to a limited degree due to the scale of the development.
18. I have had regard to the comments raised locally in support of the proposal, many of which I have addressed previously. With regard to the potential of the site falling into disrepair, I note that there is an extant planning permission for the site for a smaller scale of residential development which may address this matter. In any event, there may be other more appropriate methods to ensure the long term maintenance of the site which would not rely on harmful development such as the appeal proposal. The comments raised locally in this regard do not therefore weigh in favour of the proposal.

Overall Balance and Conclusion

19. I conclude that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and that substantial weight should be given to the harm arising from that. Furthermore, the proposal would also lead to substantial harm to the character and appearance of this area of countryside. I find that the other considerations, including the moderate weight I give to the removal of the extant buildings and associated features, do not clearly outweigh the harm that I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.
20. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policies CS1, CS3 and CS10 of the Core Strategy, Policies D8 and D9 of the Development Policies Document and the Framework, which together seek to ensure the protection of Green Belt land and ensure that development respects the character of the locality including the landscape, amongst other things.
21. For the reasons given above, and taking account of all material planning considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

David Cross

INSPECTOR