



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 September 2019

by H Porter BA(Hons) MScDip IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 02 October 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/19/3223531

Copper Beeches, Bath Road, Knowl Hill, Reading, Berks RG10 9UT

- 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 Anne & Lee Gorecki against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 182525, dated 11 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 5 December 2018.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing buildings and proposed 2 new houses.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:

- Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development for the purposes of the development plan and National Planning Policy Framework;¹
- The effect on the openness of the Green Belt;
- The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area;
- If the proposal would be inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations. If so, would this amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

3. The appeal site lies in the Green Belt and comprises a detached chalet-bungalow set within extensive grounds. The proposal would involve the demolition of the existing dwelling and its replacement with two dwellings.
4. Paragraph 143 of the Framework establishes that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except

¹ National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 133 & 143 – 147, Revised February 2019 (the Framework)

in very special circumstances. Paragraph 145 states that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt, except where, amongst other things, the complete redevelopment of previously developed land would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.

5. Although considering an outline proposal for three dwellings on a larger red-line area, a previous Inspector's decision (Ref APP/X0360/W/17/318164) is of some relevance to the appeal before me. Firstly, the conclusions drawn in relation to the definition of previously developed land (PDL) are pertinent and I see no reason to diverge from the basis that the appeal site, which lies outside a built-up area, constitutes PDL. This is not a matter in dispute.
6. The development plan policy context remains as considered by the previous Inspector and I agree that, subject to meeting the tests of openness, the proposed development would not necessarily constitute 'inappropriate development' for the purposes of paragraph 145.

Openness

7. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt and that openness is defined by an absence of buildings or other forms of development. Openness has a visual and spatial dimension.
8. Irrespective of the lawful use for three separate dwellings, the existing structures and plot layout read as one single dwelling standing in extensive grounds. At its highest point, the extant roof ridge reaches just over 6.4 metres, although the length of that ridge is relatively short, from which point the roof pitch slopes down so that the majority of the building is perceptibly lower than two storeys. Therefore, irrespective of footprint, the articulation of varying roof forms and the diminutive scale of outbuildings and extensions offer alleviation in the built form and contribute to a degree of openness around the structures on the site.
9. Although the proposed dwellings would not exceed the highest part of the existing buildings, the extent of two-storey form on the appeal site would notably increase. Cumulatively, the dwellings would include a more solid overall and unbroken bulk at roof level, and the mass and bulk of development across the site would contrast significantly with the more diminutive proportions of the existing house and associated outbuildings. Even though the latest iteration has sought to better contain the spread of development and to reduce the volume of development, the appeal proposal would, through an increase in massing, bulk and inevitable plot subdivision, lead to a reduction in openness in both spatial and visual terms.
10. In light of the foregoing, I conclude that the proposal would have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development. Therefore, the exception under criterion g) of paragraph 145 is not met. Consequently, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which is, by definition, harmful and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Consequently, conflict arises with Policy TB01 of the Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Local Plan document, 2014 (LP) insofar as it seeks to resist development that does not maintain the openness of the Green Belt.

The character and appearance of the countryside

11. The appeal site is outside any settlement limits and, for planning policy purposes, situated in the open countryside. On approach to the site from the east, the instances of development are few and dwellings tend to occupy substantial garden plots and be accessed via single, private driveways off Bath Road. The more sporadic pattern of development that punctuates the surroundings that exist outside of settlement limits makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the open countryside.
12. Like the previous Inspector, I found that the existing building is not uniquely attractive, the loss of which would not harm the established local landscape character per se. Nevertheless, the appeal site is typical of the local pattern of larger dwellings, standing in substantial plots, that have, in the majority of cases, their own driveways.
13. Even though each dwelling would benefit from good-sized gardens to the rear, relative to the prevailing local development pattern, the eventual plot sizes would each be significantly smaller than those that characterise residential development locally. Few details have been provided as to how the external areas of the dwellings would be handled. However, there can be little doubt that there would be some subdivision of the appeal site and the remainder of the garden not included within the red-line. That subdivision, as well as separation between the two dwellings, would substantially reduce the build-to-plot ratio.
14. Moreover, the provision of a shared driveway leading to two dwellings of a relatively standardised appearance introduces a contrived arrangement, akin to a suburban housing estate. This would be at odds with the prevailing loose-knit pattern of dissimilar dwellings accessed via independent driveways. Fundamentally, the proposed development would urbanise the appeal site and erode the more verdant and informal qualities of the area, thereby causing harm to the character and appearance of the area. As such, conflict arises with the General Principles for development contained within Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan Document, January 2010 (CS).
15. Policy CP11 of the CS seeks to control development outside settlement limits where, in the case of replacement dwellings, the proposal must i) bring about environmental improvements, and ii) not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
16. The Framework Glossary at Annex 2 defines 'original building' as that as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after this date, as it was built originally. The Framework does not make a specific reference to ancillary outbuildings within the curtilage of a dwelling, or to later extensions. Therefore, it is the main house as it was originally built that constitutes the original building, irrespective of the subsequent subdivisions for its use as separate dwellings.
17. The total volume of the two proposed new dwellings would be 1565m³; a decrease of 55m³ when compared to the volume of 1620m³ of the existing buildings. The original building was subject to dormer window extensions as

well as a side extension and detached garage. However, it is apparent that the total volume of existing buildings has been calculated to include the incremental extensions and outbuildings.

18. Bearing in mind my findings in relation to Green Belt openness, character and appearance, it follows that the proposed development would result in an inappropriate increase in the scale, form and footprint of the original building. Consequently, the proposal would cause harm to the quality of the environment and would fail to accord with any of the exception criteria within Policy CP11 of the CS.

Other considerations

19. Paragraph 144 of the Framework states that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. These will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt, by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
20. In the balance against the proposals is the substantial weight that must be given to the harm to the Green Belt due to the inappropriate nature of the proposed development and the harm this would cause to openness. Also weighing heavily against the scheme is the harm to the character and appearance of the area and the open countryside.
21. Comments made in support of the proposal cite that its current use has caused issues with increased traffic, rubbish and anti-social behaviour. However, there is nothing convincing that the appeal scheme would be the only, least harmful way to achieve benefits of tidying the site and reducing the number of persons living there. The appellant has expressed a willingness to enter into a CIL agreement with the Council, but there is no mechanism before me, such as a signed planning obligation to meaningfully show what benefits to local infrastructure, services and amenities could be achieved. Whilst the provision of new housing in sustainable locations is supported by national policies, the appeal scheme would involve inappropriate development in the Green Belt, outside settlement limits, that would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. This does not satisfy the environmental objective of sustainable development as per the Framework. Moreover, rather than significantly boosting the supply of housing, as there are currently three dwelling on the site, there would, in reality be a net reduction by one.
22. Having considered all the matters in support of the proposal, I conclude that, collectively, they do not clearly outweigh the totality of harm and consequently very special circumstances do not exist to justify the development.

Conclusion

23. For the above reasons, and having considered all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

H Porter

INSPECTOR

