



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 July 2019

by Jillian Rann BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 October 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/D5120/W/19/3226872

Mill Meadows, Bexley High Street, Bexley DA5 1JX

- 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 Derek & David Ovenell (Craymill Leisure Ltd) against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Bexley.
 - The application Ref 18/01129/FULM, dated 10 May 2018, was refused by notice dated 17 October 2018.
 - The development proposed is described as 'provision of 2 [no] sports pitches, removal of redundant buildings, conversion of the old livery stable into 3 residential units & construction of 6 new residential units'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for Costs

2. Two applications for costs were made by the Council of the London Borough of Bexley against Mr Derek & David Ovenell. Those applications are the subject of a separate decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. The description in the banner heading above is taken from the application form. During the course of the application revised drawings were submitted to the Council. The amendments included the deletion of one of the two proposed sports pitches, and the demolition of the old livery stable and its replacement with new buildings. The description was therefore changed by the Council to 'Provision of one all-weather hockey pitch, the removal of redundant buildings and construction of nine new residential units comprising 3 x 3 bed, 1 x 4 bed and 5 x 2 bed dwellings.' The appellant has used that revised description on the appeal form. As it accurately describes the revised proposal before me, and I am satisfied that interested parties were given the opportunity to comment on the amended scheme, I have considered the appeal on the basis of those revised drawings and that revised description.
4. There is some disagreement between the main parties as to whether the Council's decision was based on Revision D or E of Site Location drawings 1164/11, 1164/12 and 1164/13. However, the differences between those versions are minor, and relate to matters of clarification regarding pedestrian access to the all-weather (AW) pitch. Therefore, whichever version I were to consider, it would not affect my decision on the main issues as set out below.

5. Drawing number NSSHC001, indicating fencing and floodlighting to the AW pitch, was included in the appendices of the appellant's planning statement. However, the planning statement sets out that details of the pitch, including floodlighting, would be the subject of a future application by the hockey club, and the appellant has confirmed that drawing was included for illustrative purposes only. I have therefore also treated that drawing as indicative and, for the avoidance of doubt, my consideration of the AW pitch is limited solely to the effects of the pitch itself, and not to any specific or detailed boundary treatment or floodlighting proposals.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are:

- whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to the Framework and any relevant development plan policies;
- whether the proposed development would be acceptable with regard to flood risk within the appeal site and elsewhere;
- the effect of the proposed development on biodiversity;
- the safety and convenience of local residents and highway users, with particular regard to on-street parking;
- whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would clearly be outweighed by other considerations and, if so, whether this would amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal.

Reasons

7. The appeal relates to an area of land known as Mill Meadows, which is within the Green Belt, and which extends south westwards for some distance from the rear of The Old Mill on Bexley High Street along the north western side of the River Cray. The north eastern part of the site, immediately to the rear of The Old Mill, is currently occupied by a number of buildings and areas of hardstanding which were vacant at the time of my visit but which were associated with a former equestrian use of the site. The site also includes a large area of open land to the west and south west of those buildings, parts of which adjoin a cricket pitch and practice areas roughly to the north and west.
8. The appeal scheme includes the demolition of the existing equestrian buildings and the redevelopment of that part of the site with 9 new houses, with access from Bexley High Street. An AW hockey pitch is proposed on part of the undeveloped western part of the site, adjacent to the neighbouring cricket pitch and its adjoining practice areas which are also used by Burnt Ash (Bexley) Hockey Club at present. According to the appeal submissions, the AW hockey pitch is intended for use by that existing hockey club.

Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development

9. London Plan Policy 7.16 requires that the strongest protection should be given to London's Green Belt, and that inappropriate development should be refused except in very special circumstances. The aims of protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development are repeated in Policies CS01 and CS17 of the

Bexley Core Strategy (the Core Strategy). Those policies are consistent with the Framework, which states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt, and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

10. Paragraph 145 of the Framework regards the construction of new buildings as inappropriate development in the Green Belt, with exceptions which include:
 - the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with a change of use of land) for outdoor sport or outdoor recreation, as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it (bullet point b);
 - limited infilling in villages (bullet point e); and
 - limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use, which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development (bullet point g).
11. Paragraph 146 of the Framework identifies other forms of development which are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt, provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These include material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation) (bullet point e).
12. Policies ENV4 and ENV11 of the Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (the UDP) make provision for certain forms of development within the Green Belt. However, those policies are now of some age, and the exceptions and circumstances set out therein are not wholly consistent with those in the Framework. Insofar as they refer to development which is not inappropriate in the Green Belt I therefore afford those policies limited weight, and I afford greater weight to the Framework as a material consideration in that regard.
13. The Framework does not define limited infilling. Nor have I been directed to any such definition with reference to any development plan policy. I have therefore considered the proposal on the basis of the evidence before me and my own observations.
14. Whilst visible from adjacent residential properties and parts of the nearby cricket club pitches, the site does not have a road frontage, and is located to the rear of buildings on Bexley High Street which are not in the Green Belt.
15. There are existing flats roughly to the north west of the proposed dwellings, and residential buildings on the opposite side of the River Cray, roughly to the south east. The proposed residential buildings would not extend beyond the western extents of those existing groups of buildings. However, the gap between those existing buildings is of some significant width, and could not be said to be limited. Furthermore, although the flats to the north west are visible across the adjacent open land, the existing buildings to the south east are physically and visually separated from the site by the River Cray and by the dense mature tree planting alongside it, which screens those buildings in views towards the part of the site where the dwellings are proposed.
16. In that context, the proposed dwellings would not comprise, or be viewed as, the infilling of a limited gap in an otherwise continuous built-up frontage which,

I consider, would be necessary to meet the requirements of limited infill development. Consequently, I conclude that the development would not constitute limited infilling for the purposes of paragraph 145 e) or g) of the Framework.

17. The site is occupied by a number of permanent structures and their curtilage, including areas of hard surfacing, the appearance of which is consistent with their described equestrian use. Therefore, and as that former use does not fall within any of the exceptions in the Framework definition of previously developed land, I agree with the main parties that the residential development would involve the partial redevelopment of previously developed land.
18. The openness of the Green Belt has both spatial and visual aspects. The existing buildings on the site are single storey structures of relatively modest proportions and, although there is hard surfacing around them, that does not have a volume, and thus has little effect on openness.
19. However, even if their footprints were similar overall, the proposed residential buildings would be significantly taller than the existing buildings, with accommodation over 2 or 3 floors. As a result, the proposed buildings would have a significantly greater mass and volume, and thus a significantly greater effect on the openness of the Green Belt in spatial terms, compared with the existing buildings. The proposed buildings would also extend further to the north west and south west, into adjacent open land, than the existing buildings, thus further increasing their impact on the openness of the Green Belt in spatial terms compared with that existing development.
20. The gardens of several of the dwellings would also extend further into the Green Belt than the areas occupied by the existing buildings and areas of hard surfacing. Whilst parts of the appeal site are enclosed by high fencing at present, the change of use of those areas of land to domestic garden would involve the installation of further boundary treatments between individual gardens, together with the proliferation of domestic paraphernalia in those parts of the site, which would have a further erosive effect on the openness of the Green Belt compared with the existing buildings and use of the land.
21. The additional height, volume and extent of the proposed dwellings and their access and garden areas would be visible from the neighbouring flats to the north west and from parts of the adjacent cricket pitches, despite some screening from existing and proposed vegetation. From those vantage points, the proposed residential buildings would be viewed to some extent against the backdrop of taller neighbouring buildings. Nonetheless, their additional volume and height compared with the existing buildings and hard surfacing on the site, and the resultant erosive effect of those buildings and their access and garden areas on the openness of the Green Belt, would be clearly evident from those vantage points. The proposed development would therefore also cause harm to the visual openness of the Green Belt.
22. Therefore, the housing would not satisfy the relevant qualifying criteria in bullet points e) or g) of paragraph 145 of the Framework, or bullet point e) of paragraph 146. Consequently, it would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
23. I have been referred to the site having contained more buildings in the past, including with reference to photographs and a historic map. However, those

documents relate to development as it stood on the site some considerable period ago. The appellant's existing site layout drawing also indicates more structures than were on site at the time of my visit. However, I cannot be certain as to the nature of those structures, or when they were removed. In any event, in considering the relative effects on openness, I afford little weight to historic structures which have subsequently been demolished or removed from the site, and I have considered the appeal and the relative effects on openness on the basis of the existing situation and those buildings which were present at the time of my visit.

24. The AW pitch itself would not have a volume, and any associated equipment such as goalposts would be relatively limited in scale and amount, appropriate to its use for outdoor recreation, and would not harm the openness of the Green Belt. No buildings are proposed in association with the AW pitch and the appellant is not seeking detailed permission for any boundary treatments or lighting at this stage. Therefore, on the basis of the proposal before me, I conclude that the AW pitch would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. It would therefore meet the criteria in paragraphs 145 b) and 146 e) of the Framework, and would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
25. However, for the reasons given, the proposed dwellings would be inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt, and which should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Harm to the Green Belt

26. The scheme would also result in the encroachment of a suburban form development, with its access and parking areas and associated domestic paraphernalia, into the countryside. In addition to that harm to openness that I have identified, the development would therefore also conflict with one of the aims of the Green Belt as set out in the Framework.

Flood Risk

27. The Council's second reason for refusal states that the residential development would not be appropriate due to that part of the site being in Flood Zone 3b as defined in its Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, which states that areas of undeveloped land within the 1 in 20 year flood extent should be classified as Flood Zone 3b. However, the Council and the Environment Agency (EA) have confirmed that subsequent modelling of the River Cray shows that all residential elements of the proposed development would be located wholly outside the 1 in 20 year flood extent. The Council has withdrawn its second reason for refusal on that basis. Therefore, and as I have no substantive evidence before me to suggest otherwise, I have not considered that particular matter further.
28. However, parts of the site, including the area where the dwellings are proposed, are within the 1 in 100 year flood extent, and thus within Flood Zone 3a as defined in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)¹.
29. The Framework requires that, when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere.

¹ Paragraph Reference ID: 7-065-20140306

30. Whilst the proposed dwellings would be built partly on an area which is currently occupied by buildings and hard surfacing, the built footprint would alter as part of the development, and parts of the proposed buildings would extend further to the north west and south west, beyond that existing built/hard surfaced footprint. However, I have little before me by way of detailed evidence or calculations to indicate the relative extents of those existing and proposed footprints. Furthermore, it is not clear from the submissions before me to what extent changes in external ground levels are proposed in association with the construction of the dwellings or the other works proposed elsewhere on the site.
31. Therefore, on the basis of the very limited information before me, I cannot be certain as to the existing volume of flood storage on the site within the 1 in 100 year flood extent, how the built footprint and/or levels within that area are proposed to change, or how or whether that existing amount of storage would be maintained as part of the proposed development.
32. The appellant has advised that the dwellings would be built above voids, which would allow floodwaters to pass beneath them. However, those voids are not shown on the submitted drawings and I have little before me by way of detailed information with regard to their construction or size. I therefore cannot be certain as to the form or volume of those voids, how their storage capacity would compare to that of the site as it currently stands, or that their construction would allow the unobstructed flow of flood water through those areas in a flood event. Furthermore, whilst the appellant refers to a proposed programme of weekly, monthly and annual inspections of the voids by 'building management', it is not clear how access for such inspections would be guaranteed in the event of the dwellings being sold off individually for example.
33. Therefore, on the basis of the evidence before me, I cannot be certain that the proposed voids would be sufficient or appropriate to maintain current levels of flood storage capacity on the site. Nor could I be certain that their future maintenance as such, free from obstruction, would be maintained, even if they were designed sufficiently in that respect. Given the potentially significant implications for flood risk elsewhere in the event that sufficient capacity were not maintained on the site, I am not satisfied that such matters could be dealt with by condition.
34. The Framework requires a sequential approach to the location of development and states that development should not be permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower risk of flooding.
35. The appellant's Flood Risk Sequential Test Assessment (STA) concludes that there are no alternative, suitable, available sites outside of Flood Zone 3 to accommodate the appeal scheme. However, in identifying potential alternative sites for the purposes of the STA, the appellant has considered only those of an area which would also accommodate the AW pitch and its associated parking and servicing areas, in addition to the residential development.
36. In terms of flood risk, the Council has raised no objection to the AW pitch being located on the appeal site. As the AW sports pitch is a water-compatible use in the terms of the PPG, and would be located on the part of the appeal site least at risk of flooding, I have no reason to conclude differently. The sequential test

requirement thus arises solely from the proposal to locate a 'more vulnerable' residential development on that part of the site that is within Flood Zone 3.

37. The appellant acknowledges that the sequential test is only required for the residential element, but states that the residential units are required to enable the delivery of the AW pitch and therefore must both be developed together. However, I have nothing before me by way of detailed financial or viability evidence to support that statement or demonstrate that the funding and delivery of the AW pitch is directly reliant on the residential part of the scheme.
38. The AW pitch is proposed for an existing hockey club, and would thus serve the wider community, rather than just the 9 dwellings proposed. Therefore, even if I had evidence to indicate that the AW pitch's delivery was financially dependent on income from the proposed houses, I do not find that there is a direct functional link between the AW pitch and the dwellings which requires them to be located on the same site in any event. The fact that the appeal site is all within the appellant's ownership, in itself, carries limited weight, particularly in the absence of a compelling functional connection between the two parts of the development. Therefore, from the evidence before me, I am not satisfied that the two uses need to be considered together for the purposes of the sequential test.
39. Consequently, and as the STA does not give specific consideration to any sites of a size which would accommodate only the residential part of the scheme, I conclude that it has not been demonstrated that there are no suitable or available sequentially preferable sites that would accommodate that more vulnerable residential development. The sequential test is therefore not passed.
40. However, even were the sequential test to be passed, the development would still be subject to the exception test as set out in the Framework. The AW pitch would undoubtedly provide a significant benefit to the local community. However, for the reasons set out above, I also have significant reservations about whether the proposed development would be safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere. Therefore, and given the potentially significant implications arising in that regard, I conclude that those community benefits would not outweigh the flood risk in this case. Consequently, even were the sequential test to be passed, the exception test would not be passed.
41. For the reasons given, I therefore conclude that the proposed development would not be acceptable with regard to flood risk within the appeal site and elsewhere. The proposal would therefore conflict with Core Strategy Policy CS05 which, amongst other things, seeks to ensure that development mitigates against flood risk, and with the requirements of the Framework with regard to Flood Risk as set out above.

Biodiversity

42. Most of the appeal site is within the River Cray Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (SMINC). Policy 7.19 of the London Plan identifies SMINC's as having strategic nature conservation importance, and states that development proposals should give strong protection to them.
43. The description of the River Cray SMINC refers to the presence of various protected species, including breeding birds and water voles, at certain points along the river's length.

44. The appellant's Ecological Appraisal notes reference to water voles being present within a ditch network adjacent to the River Cray upstream from the site, and found that habitat with the potential to support water vole was present on the site, including areas of mud bank and vegetation. I have also been referred, anecdotally, to water vole sightings along the River Cray close to the site by interested parties. The appellant's water vole survey found no evidence of water vole and no water vole sightings. However, the weight I can afford to that survey is limited by its having been carried out in January, and therefore not at an optimal time of year to conclude as to the presence or absence of water voles in the vicinity of the site.
45. The water vole survey recommends precautionary measures in the event that water voles were to colonise the site, including an inaccessible buffer zone adjacent to the River Cray. However, as well as parts of the residential development, the scheme would also include works to construct two drainage ponds close to the river bank elsewhere in the site. On the basis of the very limited information before me regarding those ponds, I cannot be certain as to the extent of earthworks or construction activity required in those areas, or how or whether those works could be carried out without encroaching into or disturbing that buffer zone or those adjacent parts of the river bank.
46. Therefore, and as the timing of the water vole survey limits its reliability as an indication of their presence, from the evidence before me I cannot be certain that the development could be carried out without an adverse impact on water voles. Nor, given the potentially significant implications for that protected species and its habitats, am I content that the matter could be dealt with by way of a condition requiring a further water vole survey, as suggested.
47. The appellant's bat survey found no evidence of bats using or roosting in the existing buildings on the site, and no potential roost facilities were identified on any trees proposed for removal. Much of the mature riverside planting would be retained, and supplemented with additional planting, thus maintaining its continuity as a corridor for commuting and foraging bats, and bat boxes would be provided. The AW pitch would be located at one of the furthest points from the river and its adjacent vegetation. No detailed lighting proposals for the pitch or dwellings are before me. However, such proposals could be controlled by condition or may require separate planning permission, allowing the Council to request such information as was necessary to consider any implications for bats or other protected species in either event. Therefore, and in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, I am satisfied that the development would not have an adverse effect on bats.
48. Similarly, on the basis of the retained and additional vegetation on the site and the intended provision of bird nest bowls on the dwellings, I am satisfied that the development would not have an adverse effect on nesting birds, subject to restrictions on the removal of existing vegetation during the nesting season, which could be controlled by condition.
49. A reptile survey found a grass snake and common lizard on the site, and recommended further surveys to ascertain their population sizes and identify proportionate mitigation. Given the extensive size of the appeal site and the proposals to retain and improve areas of meadow land and provide additional planting, I am satisfied that such mitigation could be achieved within the site, and that further details could be satisfactorily dealt with by condition.

50. The creation of the AW pitch and the communal garden area for the dwellings would result in the removal of some existing grassland habitat and the introduction of increased human activity into those parts of the site. However, the appellant's most recent Ecological Assessment, dated July 2019, found much of that existing meadow to be species-poor as a result of recent management regimes, a matter not disputed with reference to any substantive evidence. Those remaining areas of meadow would be subject to new planting, and brought under a management regime, details of which could be secured by condition. On the basis of those improvement proposals, together with the new wetland habitat and new tree and hedge planting proposed within the site, overall I am satisfied that the development would provide an enhancement to the quality of the habitats within the site which would offset and outweigh the qualitative reduction in those areas of grassland habitat.
51. I have been referred to parts of the site being within or adjacent to two Sites of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation (SBINCs) which are not specifically mentioned in the appellant's ecological surveys, and to certain species of birds having been identified in those areas. However, the appellant's surveys cover the full extent of the land within the site boundary, and would have thus included any land within the site which was within those SBINCs. The appellant's surveys also consider the effect of the development on bird species, and I have not been referred to any other species within those other SBINCs which are not covered in the appellant's surveys. Therefore, on the basis of the evidence before me, I have no reason to conclude that the development would have adverse implications for those SBINCs referred to.
52. However, for the reasons given, I cannot be certain that the development could be carried out without adverse effects on water voles, a protected species in their own right, and one which is also specifically cited as part of the River Cray SMINC. Consequently, and given the strategic nature conservation importance of that SMINC and the species within it, overall I am not satisfied that the proposed development could be carried out without harm to biodiversity.
53. The proposal would therefore conflict with the requirements of London Plan Policy 7.19 as set out above, and with Policy CS18 of the Core Strategy which states that the Council will protect and enhance its biodiversity assets by, amongst other things, protecting, conserving and enhancing Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and resisting development that will have a significant impact on the population of protected species.

Safety and convenience of local residents and highway users

54. The appellant's parking survey indicates that there would be sufficient capacity in the car parks adjacent to the neighbouring cricket club to accommodate vehicles associated with evening and weekend matches and training sessions on the proposed AW pitch. That survey is based on observed vehicle numbers associated with the existing match and training schedule of Burnt Ash (Bexley) Hockey Club, the intended users of the AW pitch, and I have no substantive evidence before me to suggest that numbers would be higher than those set out therein.
55. The parking survey only considers the period between October and March, which appears to be based on the hockey season and the hockey club's existing agreement to use the clubhouse and pitches at the adjacent cricket club during that period, which is outside the cricket season. However, a letter in the

appellant's submissions from the Chair of the hockey club advises that the club also runs summer competitions and leagues, and I have not been provided with any details or suggestion as to how or whether the AW pitch's use would be limited solely to those 6 months referred to in the survey.

56. Therefore, there is potential for the AW pitch to be used outside of that period. On the basis of the evidence before me, I cannot be certain as to the nature or likely parking demand associated with such use, or whether that demand could consistently be met within the existing car parks, particularly as those areas would also be used by the cricket club for the other 6 months of the year. Furthermore, from the limited evidence before me, I cannot be certain as to the nature of the agreement between the hockey club and Bexley Cricket Club regarding the use of those parking areas, or how or whether their use by the hockey club in association with the AW pitch could be guaranteed on an ongoing basis for the lifetime of the development.
57. Therefore, for the reasons given, I cannot be certain that sufficient parking capacity would consistently be maintained within the site to provide for users of the AW pitch. Nor is it clear from the evidence before me whether car parks within the town centre would consistently have sufficient capacity to cater for the AW pitch, or how the development would be managed to direct people to those areas. Consequently, I could not rule out the possibility of the AW pitch leading to overspill parking on residential streets close to the site at certain times.
58. I have no reason to believe that anyone parking on nearby streets would park other than in a safe and reasonable manner, or that such parking would affect the safety of the highway. However, in the absence of any survey evidence regarding those nearby streets or their capacity for on-street parking, it is not clear whether they could accommodate further parking associated with the proposed pitch without potentially significant inconvenience to nearby residents as a result of being unable to park near their homes at times when the pitches were in use for example.
59. Therefore, for the reasons given, I cannot be certain that the development would avoid adverse effects on the convenience of local residents and highway users with particular regard to on-street parking. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policy T17 of the UDP which, amongst other things, requires applicants to make provision for off-street car parking spaces and to demonstrate how the travel needs arising from the development will be met in circumstances where there are concerns about the impact of on-street parking on amenity and traffic flow.

Other considerations

60. The AW pitch would provide improved facilities for a well-established local sports club, and significant health, wellbeing and social benefits to its members and the wider community, particularly in the context of the apparent shortfalls in hockey pitch provision in the area. However, those benefits, and the weight I afford them, are diluted in the absence of certainty that adequate parking could consistently be provided and maintained for users of the pitch.
61. Furthermore, in the absence of compelling evidence demonstrating that the funding and delivery of the AW pitch would be directly reliant on income from the proposed residential development, the benefits of that sporting facility

- carry little weight as justification for the significant harm to the Green Belt that would result from the proposed dwellings which also form part of the scheme.
62. The development would provide 9 dwellings close to local facilities and public transport links, and would contribute to local housing supply, as well as incorporating energy and water efficiency measures in their construction. However, the extent of those benefits arising from the 9 dwellings proposed would be very modest, and I afford them only limited weight.
63. Whilst not currently in use, the existing buildings on the site are of limited scale, their appearance is characteristic of their former use and semi-rural location, and I do not agree that their appearance or condition is harmful to their surroundings. Therefore, I afford little weight to their removal as a benefit which would outweigh the significant harm arising from the appeal proposals.
64. The dwellings would have adequate levels of internal and external space, and be sufficiently separated from nearby dwellings as to avoid harm to neighbours' living conditions with regard to privacy, light and outlook. Their materials and detailing would be sympathetic to their surroundings, including the Old Bexley Conservation Area. The proposals would therefore not conflict with Core Strategy Policies CS01, CS05 and CS19 or UDP policies ENV22 and ENV39 insofar as they seek to ensure that development is compatible with the character of the surrounding area and would not adversely impact on heritage assets or prejudice the environment of occupiers of adjacent property. However, the absence of harm in those respects is neutral, rather than a factor weighing in favour of the proposal.
65. My attention has been drawn to a permission granted by the Council for 6 houses in the Green Belt elsewhere in the borough. However, whilst that scheme also involved the demolition of existing buildings, including stables, from the very limited information before me it appears that the dwellings proposed in that case were deemed to have no greater effect on Green Belt openness than those existing buildings. Therefore, it appears that the circumstances in that case were not directly comparable to those in the current appeal which, in any event, I have considered on its own planning merits.

Green Belt Balance

66. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. Therefore, substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering any proposal for development within it. In this case, I have found harm to the Green Belt by reason of the proposed development's inappropriateness, and harm to the openness of the Green Belt, and I cannot be certain that the development could be carried out without harm in terms of flood risk within the site and elsewhere, harm to protected species, and harm to the convenience of nearby residents with regard to on-street parking. Balanced against that are the other considerations discussed above. However, for the reasons given, those do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other identified harm.
67. The very special circumstances necessary to justify the development therefore do not exist. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would conflict with the Green Belt protection aims of those development plan policies set out above, and with those of the Framework.

Conclusion

68. For the reasons given, and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Jillian Rann

INSPECTOR