



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 October 2019

by Jonathan Edwards BSc(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 06 November 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/K0425/W/19/3234188

**Land adjoining Saddleback Barn, Lower Icknield Way, Longwick,
Buckinghamshire HP27 9RL**

- 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 J Collinswood (Trustees of the Round Chapel) against the decision of Wycombe District Council.
 - The application Ref 17/06648/FUL, originally dated 18 May 2017, was refused by notice dated 12 March 2019.
 - The development proposed is change of use of land and construction of single storey round chapel of remembrance with associated parking and access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The appeal form indicates that the description of the development has changed from that given on the original planning application form to that in the banner above. Also, a revised application form dated 24 April 2018 provides the above description. As both main parties agree to the revised description, I have determined the appeal on this basis.
3. Since the submission of the appeal, the Wycombe District Local Plan 2019 (LP) has been adopted. This replaces both the Wycombe District Local Plan to 2011 and the Wycombe Development Framework Core Strategy. The Delivery and Site Allocations Document 2013 (the DSAD) has been largely retained. I am satisfied that both parties have had the opportunity to consider the effects of the LP's adoption.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are (i) whether the appeal site would provide a suitable location for the development having regard to local and national policies and accessibility, and (ii) the effect on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Suitability of Location

5. The appeal site lies outside the Green Belt but in open countryside. In such areas, LP policy DM44 states that permission will only be granted for certain types of development. The construction of a chapel is not a permissible type of development and so the proposal would be contrary to LP policy DM44.

6. The appeal site is located away from any settlement. Public transport links in Longwick village or elsewhere are not within reasonable walking distance. Also, Lower Icknield Way has no roadside pavements and so is unattractive to pedestrians. The lack of dedicated cycleways and the level of traffic on the road would discourage cycling to the proposal. Even when recognising differences between urban and rural areas as referred to in paragraph 103 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), visitors to the proposed chapel would be unduly reliant upon the car.
7. The proposal is expected to meet a national and regional need for a place where bereaved parents can visit. Due to journey distances, some visitors would be likely to use the car regardless as to the chapel's location. However, there is no evidence before me that demonstrates visitors to the chapel would only want to travel by car. The Child Bereavement UK charity advises that a place specifically aimed at supporting bereaved families would need to be easily accessible by both private and public transport. For the reasons given above, the proposed development would fail to comply with this advice.
8. The appeal site is in a relatively quiet location that would facilitate peaceful remembrance. However, no evidence has been submitted to show that only isolated rural locations would provide an appropriate environment for the chapel. As such, the requirement for tranquillity fails to override my concerns relating to the inaccessibility of the proposal.
9. The appellant contends that refusing permission for the appeal scheme would be inconsistent with the planning permission granted for a burial ground at Meadle. I do not have information on all the issues taken into account in the determination of that planning application. However, there are significant differences between a burial ground and the appeal proposal. For example, a burial ground is more likely to require a large area of open land, thereby ruling out many sites within settlements. Also, unlike chapels, cemeteries are listed under LP policy DM44 as a development that is potentially permissible in the countryside outside the Green Belt. Therefore, it would not be inconsistent with the decision to allow the burial ground to dismiss this appeal.
10. For the reasons outlined above, I conclude the appeal site would not provide a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to local and national policies and accessibility. Consequently, and in this regard, it would not accord with policy DM44 of the LP and the Framework, which aim, amongst other things, to avoid development away from settlements and to manage patterns of growth to promote walking, cycling and public transport use. Policy DM1 of the DSAD is referred to but is not relevant to this main issue.

Character and appearance

11. The proposed chapel would be located in the centre of an open field that is adjacent to a small cluster of buildings including Saddleback Barn. Despite these buildings, the area is predominantly rural in character with open fields, hedgerows and agricultural buildings.
12. The proposed chapel would include features typical of a traditional church. The nearby cluster includes mainly converted agricultural buildings which, whilst now in residential use, are of a design typical of the open rural location. The proposed chapel would fail to reflect the appearance and character of the

nearby buildings and would stand away from the cluster. As such, it would be incongruous.

13. Churches and such like buildings are often seen in the countryside, although are more likely to be located within village churchyards rather than in fields away from settlements. Even though the proposed building would be of an interesting design appropriate to its purpose, it would stand out as being an unusual feature in the centre of a field in a largely open countryside setting.
14. Hedgerows on the boundaries of the field would provide some screening, although the roof of the chapel would be partially viewable from the adjacent properties. These views would be from private land and the chapel would not be seen from the road. However, this limited visibility fails to fully overcome or override my concerns in respect of incongruity.
15. It has not been shown how the proposed dwellings on the other side of the road would affect the character and appearance of the area around the appeal site. Therefore, this factor fails to address my concerns in respect of this main issue.
16. For the reasons outlined above, I conclude the development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, and in this regard, it would not accord with policy DM35 of the LP which aims, amongst other things, to ensure development is of a design appropriate to the character and appearance of an area.

Other Matters

17. Whilst there is only limited evidence on the demand for such a facility, the proposal would potentially be of benefit to bereaved people in need of support. I have given positive regard to this factor in my assessment of the appeal.
18. The appellant's concerns over the manner of the Council's Planning Committee's consideration of the proposal goes beyond my remit in the determination of this appeal. However, I have assessed the proposal on the basis it has been put before me as a proposed chapel and paid no regard to any suggestion that it may be used for other purposes.
19. In addition to the above suggested benefits, I have noted the other points made in support of the appeal scheme. However, these do not either singly or in combination, lead me away from my conclusion.
20. Overall, the benefits of the proposal are modest and insufficient to outweigh the significant harm caused by reason of the unsuitable location for the appeal proposal and harm to the character and appearance of the area.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons given above, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Jonathan Edwards

INSPECTOR