



Appeal Decision

Inquiry commenced on 18 June 2019

Site visit made on 1 August 2019

by C Sherratt DipURP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 18 December 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/P1560/C/17/3189269

Land at 110 Colne Way, Point Clear, St Osyth, Essex CO16 8LW

- The appeal is made under section 174 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.
 - The appeal is made by Ingrid Blaser against an enforcement notice issued by Tendring District Council.
 - The enforcement notice, numbered 16/00367/BRCHC3, was issued on 9 October 2017.
 - The breach of planning control alleged in the notice is failure to comply with condition No 2 of a planning permission Ref TEN119/59 dated 7 May 1959 with amended plans approved on 5 November 1959 for construction of new chalets and Planning Permission TEN/119G/59 dated 23 March 1961 approving details of new chalets.
 - The development to which the permission relates is construction of new chalets.
 - The condition in question is No 2 which states that: The chalets shall be used for human habitation only during the period 1 March to 31 October in each year and during the winter months may be used for storage of household effects.
 - The notice alleges that the condition has not been complied with by the habitation (occupation) of this chalet between the period of 1 November and 28 February (29 in leap years) each year otherwise than in compliance with condition 2 of the said planning permission TEN/119/59 and condition 2 of the said planning permission TEN/119G/59.
 - The requirements of the notice are to:
 1. Comply with Condition 2 of planning permission TEN/119/59 dated 7 May 1959 and layout amended on 5 November 1959 by ceasing the habitation (occupation) of the chalet on the land between 1 November and 28 February (29 in leap years) each year.
 2. Comply with Condition 2 of Planning Permission TEN/119G/59 dated 23 March 1961 by ceasing the habitation (occupation) of the chalet on the land between 1 November and 28 February (29 February in leap years) each year.
 - The period for compliance with the requirements is three months.
 - The appeal is proceeding on the grounds set out in section 174(2)(a) and (d) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended.
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Procedural Matters

1. A number of appeals relating to several properties at Point Clear Bay were heard together at the above Inquiry. General evidence relating to flooding considerations and proximity to services and facilities, common to many appeals containing ground (a), including this one, was heard during Week 1 and presented on behalf of a number of appellants by Mrs Kelly. There was an opportunity for any matters specific to individual appeals were heard throughout the remainder of the Inquiry. The appellant attended on 18 July 2019.

2. Whilst no corrections are required to this Notice, it has been necessary to correct the period for compliance in relation to a number of the notices relating to other appeal properties. The Council's witness accepted that there should be a consistent compliance period across this group of appeals. Accordingly, I intend to vary the compliance period to 14 months to correspond with the longest period specified amongst this set of appeal notices should the Notice be upheld.

Decision

3. The appeal is allowed and the enforcement notice is quashed.

Reasons

Ground (d)

Main Issues

4. Ground (d) is pleaded on the basis that at the date when the notice was issued, no enforcement action could be taken in respect of the breach alleged in the notice; in other words, it was too late for the local planning authority to take action. The time limits for taking enforcement action are set out in Section 171B of the Act. In these appeals S171B(3) applies which states that in the case of any other breach of planning control, no enforcement action may be taken after the end of the period of ten years beginning with the date of the breach.
5. For the appeal on ground (d) to succeed the onus is upon the appellant to demonstrate, on the balance of probability, that the condition referred to in the enforcement notice has been breached for a continuous period of ten years or more prior to the date of the issue of the Enforcement Notice; in other words that the property has been occupied during the winter period for 10 consecutive years without compliance with the condition.

The Legal points

6. An enforcement notice was issued in 1999 that relates to the same breach. The point was made on behalf of the appellant that it was therefore too late for the Council to take further enforcement action because S171B (4)(b) explains that the preceding sub-sections (those sub-sections that set out the time limits beyond which no action may be taken), do not prevent the taking of further enforcement action in respect of any breach of planning control if, during the period of four years ending with that action being taken, the local planning authority have taken or purported to take enforcement action in respect of that breach. This is often referred to as the 'second bite provision' as it allows the local planning authority to take further action outside of the time limits set out in S171B(1), (2) and (3) provided it does so within this 4-year period. It does not however impose a 4-year time limit within which the Council can take further action when that further action is taken within the time limits set out in those preceding sub-sections.
7. The Council properly conceded that it was not relying on the second bite provisions, accepting that it was too late to do so. I agree that the current enforcement notice was issued too late for the Council to rely on S171B(4)(b). In this case, the relevant date against which the ten-year period should be assessed is on or before 9 October 2007.

8. Nevertheless, the 1999 enforcement notice remains in force and is not before me. Accordingly, it is not for me to consider the validity or otherwise of that notice. An appeal against it was subsequently withdrawn.
9. The Council therefore submits that the continued occupation of the property after the period specified for compliance with the previous notice, was and continues to be a criminal offence. Accordingly, the Council say the appellant cannot benefit from a claim that an on-going breach, after this compliance date, would contribute to the ten-year 'immunity' period, otherwise the appellant would benefit from their own wrong doing.
10. In support of this submission the Council relies on the judgement of *Welwyn Hatfield v SSCLG v Beesley* [2011] UKSC 15 ('the Welwyn Hatfield judgement'). In this case Mr Beesley was claiming he had gained immunity for the use of a building as a dwellinghouse. One of the issues involved consideration of the scope and application of the principle that, unless the contrary intention appears, statutes are to be construed to the effect that no one should be allowed to profit from his own wrong. The Court noted that Mr Beesley intended to deceive the Council from the outset by his statements in the planning application. This was positive deception in matters integral to the planning process and directly intended to undermine that process. The Court found that the principle applied despite acknowledging that Mr Beesley's conduct was "not identifiably criminal" and thus not only relevant where there has been the commission of a crime.
11. In this case, there has been no positive deception on the part of the appellant. This is a point accepted by the Council. However, the Council submits that there has nevertheless been the commission of a crime as a result of non-compliance with the BOCN, which is still on-going, and so the principle that no one should benefit from their own wrong doing is clearly applicable.
12. However, I consider the circumstances differ in this case. The Council has not been deceived due to the actions of the appellant in this case so that it 'missed' an opportunity to take any action in the same way that had occurred in *Welwyn Hatfield*, due to the actions of Mr Beesley. Indeed, it did serve a notice. The Council could, at any time since serving the notice, have sought to prosecute non-compliance with it through the Magistrates Court; it still could. The Council has simply chosen not to do so to date. That is different to the circumstances in *Welwyn Hatfield* where the Council could not have taken action within the required time limits in the first place because the breach was purposely hidden to prevent them from doing so.
13. Furthermore, the *Welwyn Hatfield* judgement also relates to an appeal against the refusal of a certificate of lawfulness rather than an appeal against an enforcement notice – Mr Beesley was therefore trying to establish that the use as a dwellinghouse was lawful. I recognise that under section 191(3) of the Act it is clear that a use cannot be lawful if it is in breach of a BoCN or an Enforcement Notice (s191(3)(b)) and out of time (s191(3)(a)). But no certificate of lawfulness is being sought alongside this ground (d) appeal. Rather the question before me, is solely whether at the date when the notice was issued, no enforcement action could be taken in respect of any breach of planning control which may be constituted by those matters.

14. On that basis, it seems to me that a breach that cannot be lawful due to the existence of the enforcement notice, can nevertheless give rise to a successful appeal on ground (d) and the quashing of the notice at issue.

The evidence

15. I turn now to consider the evidence specific to this case. All evidence in relation to this ground of appeal was given under oath.
16. In the case of a continuing requirement condition, such as the case here, discontinuance of the offending activity will bring an end to that particular breach. The clock starts again with any subsequent breach. The period of compliant activity needs to be significant and not de minimis, as a matter of fact and degree. The cessation of that breach means that the clock would start again for any fresh breach of the condition. The question to be asked during any period of compliant occupation is whether enforcement action could have been taken against a breach of the condition.
17. The appellant purchased the property in 1997. She provides various letters from utility suppliers such as Affinity Water whom confirm she has received bills for the property since April 1997. A letter from Councillor Michael Talbot confirms that the appellant requested delivery of the Parish magazine since 2005. A neighbour who has lived next door since 2001 also confirms that, to her knowledge, the appellant's only residence is the appeal property. Another neighbour confirms they have known the appellant since the day she moved in on 1 April 2007. This was re-affirmed during the oral evidence from both the appellant and one of the neighbours.
18. The Council do not dispute that the appellant has lived in the property in breach of the condition for in excess of 10 years prior to the breach. This is also supported by the Council Tax records provided by the Council which show no discounts or exceptions have been applied since April 2003. Rather the council's case turned on my findings on the effect of the earlier enforcement notice.
19. Accordingly, the evidence submitted does demonstrate that the property has been occupied in breach of the relevant condition for a continuous period of 10 years or more. The appeal on ground (d) therefore succeeds and the Notice will be quashed.
20. Whilst my decision results in the quashing of the enforcement notice because I have found it was too late for the Council to take action in this case, it has no effect on the earlier enforcement notice. I recognise that success on ground (d) and the resultant quashing of the notice may not therefore be of much comfort to the appellant in the knowledge that any on-going breach would still not appear to be lawful as the 1999 enforcement notice would still exist. However, it would be a matter for the Council to decide whether to bring any prosecution proceedings against the failure to comply with that notice.
21. Furthermore, as the Enforcement Notice that is the subject of this appeal will be quashed, there is no alleged breach against which the deemed planning application and ground (a) can be assessed in this appeal. Accordingly, I am unable to proceed to determine whether planning permission should be granted in this case.

Conclusion

22. To conclude, the appeal on ground (d) therefore succeeds and the notice will be quashed.

C Sherratt

Inspector

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Mr Everett

He called

Mrs Mandy Kelly

Mrs Ingrid Blaser

Ms J Easey

General Planning Issues

Appellant

Neighbour

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Mr Richard Ground QC

He called

Ms Hanna Coogan

Mr Guy Cooper

Mr Keith Hutchinson

Mr Chris Stathers

Instructed by the Council's solicitor

Technical Director in Flood Risk Management
with Jeremy Benn Associates Limited

For the Environment Agency

Of Hutchinsons Planning and Development
Consultants

Enforcement Officer for Tendring District Council

Documents received at the Inquiry

Document A

Document B

Document C

Statement from appellant.

Letter from Councillor Talbot.

Letter from Tendring DC dated 19 September
2017.

Document 1

Document 2

Appeal Notification - Copy of Site Notice.

Opening Statement by Mrs M Kelly regarding
flooding.

Document 3

Document 4

EA Supplementary Maps 1 and 2.

Extract from NPPG 'Flood risk and coastal
change'.

Document 5

Document 6

Judgement: Wisenfeld v Secretary of State for
the Environment and another [1992] 1 PLR 32.

Judgement: Michael William Howells v SoSCLG &
Glostershire County Council [2009] EWHC
2757 (Admin).

Document 7

Decision Notice 16/00809/FUL – variation of
seasonal occupancy period at Seawick Holiday
Village.

Document 8

Extract from Strategic Housing Land Availability
Assessment (May 2019).

Document 9

EA comments and Committee Report relating to
planning application for replacement dwelling at
138 Colne Way.

Document 10

Document 11

Historic Planning Permissions.

Legal Submissions on Breach of Condition Notice
for Tendring DC.

Document 12

Document 13

Legal Submissions from Mandy Kelly.

Welwyn Hatfield BC v SSCLG & another
[2011] UKSC 15.

Document 14

Bonsall v SSCLG & another [2015] EWCA Civ
1246.

Document 15

Closing Submissions from Mr Everett.

Document 16

Closing Submissions from Mr Ground QC for the Council.

Document 17

Closing Submissions from Mandy Kelly.