
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 January 2020

by J Gibson BUEP MPIA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 February 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/H1515/W/19/3237699

Stapleford Abbots Golf Club, Tysea Hill, Stapleford Abbots, Romford RM4 1JU

- 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 Stapleford Abbots Golf Club against the decision of Brentwood Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00761/FUL, dated 20 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 12 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of existing gardener's shed and erection of identical shed in new location central within the site.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The above description of development has been taken from the appellant's application form. The Council's decision notice describes the development in further detail as "demolish existing gardeners shed situated within Epping Forest District and construction detached building for gardeners use in central position of site".

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard for openness and the purposes of including land within it;
 - if the proposal is inappropriate development whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, or any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Inappropriateness of development, openness and Green Belt purpose

4. Great importance is attributed to Green Belts under Paragraph 133 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, which are the defining characteristics of Green Belts. Policies CP1, GB1, GB2, GB22 and GB23 of the Brentwood Replacement Local Plan (RLP) (adopted

August 2005) collectively reflect this objective and apply it within the local context. Specifically, Policy CP1 sets out general criteria to protect the visual characteristics of areas, GB1 and GB2 details criteria for development within the Green Belt, and Policies GB22 and GB23 relate to outdoor sports facilities and their ancillary buildings within the Green Belt. The appeal site is centrally located within the Stapleford Abbots Golf Club site and is in the Green Belt.

5. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) defines inappropriate development as a proposal which would be harmful to the Green Belt under Paragraph 143. Paragraph 145 expands upon this by specifying that the construction of a new building should be considered inappropriate, noting specific exceptions. Criteria under item b) of Paragraph 145 offers scope for appropriate facilities for outdoor sport uses to be provided within the Green Belt, as long as such facilities would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would not conflict with the purpose of including land within it.
6. The appeal proposal relates to the demolition and relocation of the existing gardener's shed and associated enclosure for the golf club. The existing facility is located towards the western most corner of the golf course along the road frontage with Tysea Hill, where the predominant built form within the area is concentrated. The appeal site is currently undeveloped within the centre of the site with some natural vegetation and landscaped features. The appeal site in its current state is complementary of the open setting and naturally vegetated characteristics which the golf course preserves.
7. The erection of a comparably sized gardener's shed within this proposed location would introduce a distinctly urbanising feature which would detract from the current sense of openness experienced. The external use of the shed would likely further degrade the level of openness currently experienced, based on my observations of how the existing enclosure was being utilised for the stockpiling of materials, staff parking and other related paraphernalia. No details on the likely means of secured enclosure have been provided either which would likely have a further effect upon openness.
8. I note the appellants argument that the proposed gardener's shed would be "identical" to the existing building and would therefore not result in a net loss of openness. This argument is partly founded on the suggestion that the existing gardener's shed and enclosure would be demolished, then rehabilitated with new landscaping to improve the sense of openness currently experienced from the public realm. However, no details of the existing shed dimensions have been provided and therefore cannot be substantiated against the appeal proposal. Notwithstanding this, it is my view that the introduction of the proposed gardener's shed and enclosure within an undeveloped portion of the site, away from any related buildings and the predominant built form, would be more harmful to the openness of the Green Belt than retaining the existing facility as is and making improvements on existing developed land.
9. The appeal proposal would therefore represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Accordingly, the proposed demolition of the existing gardener's shed and erection of an identical shed within the centre of the golf course would harm the openness of the Green Belt. It conflicts with Policies CP1, GB1, GB2, GB22 and GB23 of the Brentwood RLP and thus contradicts the purpose of the Green Belt to restrict urban sprawl and protect the countryside

from encroachment. Paragraph 144 of the Framework requires me to attribute substantial weight to this harm.

Other considerations

10. The appellant describes the existing facility (comprising both the shed and enclosure) in their documentation as being of poor condition, not fit for purpose to store necessary equipment, as having a harmful design which is bulky and inappropriate, and not secure. It is therefore unclear as to how an "identical" shed as proposed would be better equipped to store necessary equipment, or how it would be an improvement to the current levels of openness if it is replicating the same "bulky and inappropriate design" as the existing shed. I have therefore attributed minimal weight to this argument.
11. The appellant also highlights their concerns over the security of the existing facility. No details regarding their specific security concerns for the existing facility, nor any instigating incidents to prompt such concerns, have been provided for consideration. During my site visit I observed that the existing shed was well secured with dense landscaping, fences, gates, padlocks, warning signage for security dogs within the enclosure and restricted access to the public highway through the car park after hours. Without further details on the appellant's concerns I can only attribute minimal weight to this consideration.
12. I note the contribution that the proposed facility would have towards improving the commercial viability of the golf course as a business, by providing quality facilities for staff which enable them to carry out maintenance arrangements more efficiently, whilst providing essentials services for them (i.e. change rooms, showers, toilets). There is some suggestion in the appellant's representation that the proposed facility may include "ancillary accommodation", however this was not identified within the original application form for consideration and would be considered inappropriate development under the relevant Framework criteria. Setting this aside, the benefits identified attract moderate weight acknowledging the in principle policy support for such outdoor sporting activities to be located within the Green Belt.
13. I note the suggested benefits to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers, and the surrounding character and appearance of the area, by demolishing the existing gardener's shed and rehabilitating the site with new landscaping. I have attributed minimal weight to this consideration acknowledging the generous separation distance between the existing facility and neighbouring residential dwellings, and the dense planting of vegetation along Tysea Hill and shared boundaries which offer some visual reprieve from the facility.
14. A number of environmental benefits have been put forward by the appellant including reduced pollution due to the shorter maintenance routes, decontamination of land subject to the existing facility, and the potential for landscaping at both the existing and proposed sites. Little detail has been provided as to how these measures would be carried out to support these outcomes. Council have further indicated that the golf course is subject to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). No details have been provided as to how the appeal site relates to this SSSI or what measures would be taken to protect it if necessary. The suggested discharge of runoff from the proposed maintenance equipment wash down area into the adjoining watercourse adds to this concern of potential environmental harm. I have therefore attributed

limited weight to this argument based on the lack of information provided and the sensitivity of the appeal site as undeveloped land.

Conclusion

15. The Green Belt harm carries substantial weight and for the reasons give above is not clearly outweighed by other considerations. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.
16. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Gibson

INSPECTOR