
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 February 2020

by L J O'Brien BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23rd June 2020.

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/W/19/3239503

64 Christchurch Road, Ferndown, Dorset BH22 8ST

- 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 The Dudsbury Golf Club against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref 3/19/0917/FUL, dated 10 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 24 June 2019.
 - The development proposed is construction of a single storey extension to "Spikes Bar", Dudsbury Golf Club.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. At the time of my site visit the proposed development had been constructed. Whilst the development generally appeared to have been constructed in accordance with the plans before me, for the avoidance of doubt, I have determined this appeal on the basis of the submitted plans.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - Whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies.
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt.
 - If the proposal were to be found to be inappropriate development, would the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

4. The appeal site, Dudsbury Golf Club, is an active golf club, hotel and spa with an attached restaurant and bistro. The Golf Club is situated within the South East Dorset Green Belt.
5. The proposal is for the construction of a single storey extension to "Spikes Bar". The extension includes a ramp to provide disabled access and allows the Bar to accommodate additional customers.

Whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development

6. Saved Policy KS3 of the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan Part 1 - Core Strategy 2014 (CS) sets out the purposes of the Green Belt, its boundaries and, referring to the previous version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), identifies the strategy for previously developed sites but does not otherwise address detailed Green Belt policy. Notwithstanding the policy was adopted in 2014, Green Belt policy in the current version of the Framework has not substantially changed from the previous version.
7. I note the appellant's statement that Policy KS3 of the Core Strategy is dated. However, in my view, Policy KS3 is not directly relevant to the proposal before me as it does not address detailed Green Belt policy and I have, consequently, considered the proposal in the context of the policies within the Framework.
8. Paragraph 143 of the Framework identifies that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 145 states that new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt, save for a limited number of exceptions. The exceptions include, under paragraph 145 b), the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
9. Whilst the proposed extension is indeed linked to a facility for outdoor sport and recreation it is not, in itself, necessary to facilitate such a use. The proposed extension would, rather, provide the opportunity for the existing bar to enhance its offering and would supplement that use. As such, in my view the proposal does not fall within the exceptions listed under paragraph 145 b).
10. Paragraph 145 also includes, at c), an exception for the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. The Glossary to the Framework states that the original building is a building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally.
11. In this instance the planning history provided by the parties sets out that the original building was a golf clubhouse, greenkeepers facilities and ten holiday cottages granted planning permission in around 1990. It is clear from the planning history that the building has been substantially altered and extended since the original permission.
12. Several extensions to the Bar have been granted permission over the years and, more significantly, an extension to provide 17 hotel bedrooms, a spa, reception area with lounge and bar above and a covered walkway was granted permission. There does not appear to be any dispute between the parties that these permissions have been implemented.
13. The current building is, therefore, already notably larger than the original building. I note the appellant's view that the proposed scheme represents an extremely small proportion of the current building. However, the Framework is clear in the approach to be taken and, as set out above, the comparison must

be drawn between the proposed extension and the smaller original, unextended, building.

14. For these reasons, in my view, the proposed further increase in the size of the building would result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building.
15. Accordingly, I do not consider that the appeal scheme can be treated as being within the exceptions identified in paragraph 145 of the Framework. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt

16. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence as set out in paragraph 133 of the Framework. The appellant states that the footprint occupied by the extension was previously laid to hard standing (paved) with a number of awnings to provide shelter for diners.
17. The extension is visible from a number of viewpoints within the golf club and is seen in the context, and as part of, the much larger club building. It is not visible from the public domain and the effect on openness from a visual perspective is therefore minimal.
18. The extension would inevitably have some effect on the openness of the Green Belt as it introduces a more substantial development into an area which was previously largely free from the built form. However, the area previously hosted semi-permanent furniture, awnings and paving which would, themselves, have reduced the openness of the Green Belt. Therefore, for the reasons outlined above, I consider that the openness of the Green Belt would be diminished, albeit to a limited degree.

Other considerations

19. The appellant states that the proposed extension is required to support the economic viability of the club through the revenue received from the additional covers and the ability for the extension to hold functions. I accept that the additional space facilitates additional covers and, thereby enhances the profitability of the space. However, I have not been provided with any detailed substantive viability evidence which supports the requirement for the extension in respect of the ongoing viability of the golf club. As such, I afford this consideration limited weight.
20. The appellant has provided letters of support from Dorset Ladies County Golf Association and England Golf. The letters praise the facilities provided by Dudsbury Golf Club and also state that the club has had success in growing the game of golf within the local community as well as the wider county. Both letters are complementary about the work undertaken by the club in respect of ladies and junior golf and state that the facilities, particularly the extension, are well used. Though these achievements are social benefits and carry some weight in favour of the proposal, I am not persuaded that the activities and schemes referred to are dependant entirely on the extension to such an extent that they would cease should this appeal fail. As such, these benefits carry modest weight in favour of the appeal.

21. Further benefits of the scheme include the enhanced accessibility provided by the ramp which forms part of the scheme before me and the contribution made towards the local rural economy.
22. I note that the Council considered that the use of matching materials and low profile of the development ensure that it is subservient to the host building and has an acceptable character and appearance in this respect. I also note that the Council's Conservation Officer found that the proposal would not cause harm to nearby designated heritage assets. I agree with these conclusions. Similarly, I acknowledge that the proposal received very few representations and that no comments were received from Natural England or Ferndown Town Council.
23. The extension would not cause harm to amenity or highway safety and would not be located in an area prone to flooding. I also recognise that there would be no conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt in respect of checking unrestricted urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The lack of harm in these respects, however, is a neutral factor within the planning balance, weighing neither for nor against the proposal.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

24. The Framework establishes that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 144 of the Framework sets out that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt and very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
25. I have found that the proposal would not meet criterion (b) or (c) of paragraph 145 of the Framework and would therefore be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The proposal would also cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Whilst the harm to openness is of a limited nature it nevertheless adds further weight in respect of the harm caused by the proposal.
26. I have taken account of the other considerations raised as part of this appeal. Factors in support of the appeal include the viability, economic, social and accessibility benefits attributed to the proposal.
27. However, for the reasons set out above, the cumulative benefits associated with the scheme are not sufficient to outweigh the substantial weight given to the harm to the Green Belt I have outlined above. Consequently, the very special circumstances that are necessary to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt do not exist and the proposal fails to accord with the Framework.
28. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

L J O'Brien

INSPECTOR