



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 September 2020

by H Porter BA(Hons) MSc Dip IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/20/3254190

Corsley House, Deep Lane, Corsley BA12 7QH

- 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 G Senk against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref 19/10108/WCM, dated 15 October 2019, was refused by notice dated 14 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is the creation of a landscape and amenity bund with ancillary native tree planting to enhance residential amenity, biodiversity, drainage and the overall setting of a Grade II Listed Building with the ancillary diversion of an existing public right of way at land to the north of the A362, Corsley, Warminster.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, including whether it would conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and preserve the setting of the Grade II listed building, Corsley House.

Reasons

3. The appeal site covers the southern end of two fields of paddock pasture land bounded by mature hedgerows, which is part of a wider parkland estate associated with Corsley House, a Grade II listed building and is situated within the AONB.
4. The character and appearance of the area are distinguished by verdant countryside interspersed with occasional farmsteads, detached dwellings and small settlements in a largely rural surroundings and distinctive natural landscape. The appeal site and Corsley House grounds are flat, beyond which are distinctive notable topographic changes towards Cley Hill, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and the wooded escarpment of the Longleat Estate.
5. The A362 transport corridor that runs immediately south of the appeal site influences the local environs. At the time of my visit to the appeal site, on a still late-morning in early September, I observed a constant, if not heavy, flow of traffic along the A362. My own experience was just a snapshot in time, and I am mindful that traffic volumes and traffic noise would be subject to time and sessional variations. In my judgement, the noise associated with the A362 does

- not materially detract from the area's unspoiled, peaceful, if not silent, rural character and a unique sense of place.
6. The appellant has submitted a Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA) that usefully sets out the various landscape type and character assessments for the area. Amongst the key characteristics of the Avon Vales National Character Area are 'transport corridors along roads... heavily influential on all development'. Amongst the positive landscape features of significance that characterise Greensand Terrace Landscape Type are 'flat aprons of land from which the dramatic chalk escarpments and hills rise' and 'dramatic views from the terraces to the steeply rising backdrop of the chalk escarpments'.
 7. The characteristic features of both national and district landscape character are very much apparent at the appeal site and its wider environs. The locality also exhibits the special qualities identified within the Cranborne AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019, being largely unspoilt, with the landscape including distinctive and sometimes dramatically sculpted landforms.
 8. The appeal scheme proposes the construction of a bund, at least 4 metres high and some 329 metres in length, which would follow the site's southern boundary close to the A362. The proposed bund would be contoured and undulating, and planted with native trees, grasses and wildflowers on completion. The bund would feature steeply banked sides on three sides and a more gentle profile on its north face towards Corsley House. During construction, it is proposed to create a temporary access and 'haul road' that would run from Deep Lane into the northwest corner of the site.
 9. The proposal would introduce a substantial, alien, artificial landscape feature, entirely at odds with the flat plateau nature of the appeal site. The natural local landform would be significantly altered, and the scale of the proposal would amount to a sizeable, engineered intrusion. The provision of a scheme of tree planting and landscaping across the site is intended to soften the visual impact of the proposals. However, even if the bund itself would not reach above the height of the site's southern hedgerow boundary or break the skyline, in all likelihood, the trees and planting proposed would. The effect of contouring and planting the bund would, in my judgement, serve to emphasise rather than alleviate its impact, causing it to appear as a conspicuous arbitrary feature, which would neither integrate with the existing hedgerow boundaries, nor assimilate with the flat local landscape.
 10. I visited the appeal site in early September and views towards it from Cley Hill were largely obscured by the canopies of trees in full leaf. Even if, during winter months, the proposed bund was not visible from Cley Hill, it would nonetheless erode the local landscape setting around Cley Hill itself. Most notably, the bund would be obvious from nearby public rights of way and gated field entrances along Deep Lane. From such vantages, the appeal scheme would compete in views with Cley Hill so that the prominence and dramatic impact of this landscape feature would be harmfully undermined. Even if conditions could control the length of construction phase, this would undoubtedly result in significant disturbance compared with the relative peace that would be experienced from the appeal site, nearby public rights of way and along Deep Lane.
 11. I conclude that the proposal would be a sizable landscape intrusion that would have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the area. There would be a serious adverse effect on the landscape of the site and surrounding

area. Whilst the degree of harm would lessen over distance, the not insubstantial incursion along the unspoilt plateau below Cley Hill and the Longleat escarpment would fail to preserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB. The proposed development would therefore not accord with Core Policy 51, which seeks to protect, conserve and enhance Wiltshire's distinctive landscape character and includes the natural environment. There would also be conflict with Core Policy 52 insofar as it seeks to protect and enhance the green infrastructure network.

12. Taking into account the volume of material, the length of time and noise associated with its construction, I consider that it would be major development. The National Planning Policy Framework, revised February 2019 establishes that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in the AONB, where the scale and extent of development should be limited and planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. These are matters which I will turn to in the overall planning balance below.

Setting of Corsley House

13. Corsley House was added to the Statutory List in 1968; the statutory list description identifies it as being mid-18th century and rebuilt for Nathaniel Barton, although the appellant's Heritage Statement considers it most likely being, at least in part, of much earlier origin. The house stands in formal gardens that extend to a planned parkland estate. To this day, Corsley House is experienced as inextricably linked with its parkland and wider landscape setting. Therefore, beyond its historic fabric, architectural evolution and historic associations, the significance and special interest of Corsley House are informed by its setting within an historic parkland and the wider dramatic Wiltshire countryside beyond it.
14. The appeal site is situated at the southern end of the estate parkland, which the appellant's Heritage Statement considers has altered little since it was planned, including the channelled view from the southern elevation of Corsley House over its flat parkland out to the rising topography of the Longleat escarpment in the mid to far distance. The appeal site is part of the historic parkland surroundings from which the asset is experienced and certainly comprises part of its setting, contributing to its significance and special interest as a highly graded designated asset.
15. The historic map extracts provided in the Heritage Assessment indicate that the general route and proximity to Corsley House of what is now the A362 have existed since at least the early 19th century. As already noted, I did not experience excessive or obtrusive noise from the A362, although I accept that traffic volumes and noise levels could increase at busier times of day or with changes in wind direction. However, busy A roads run are a not-uncommon feature within the English countryside and proximate to historic houses. In my judgement I do not consider that the presence or the noise associated with the A362 has diminished the special interest of the Grade II listed building or the ability to appreciate its significance.
16. Even with contouring and landscaping, the proposal would impose an alien and obtrusive feature within the setting of Corsley House, which would not, in my opinion, be 'readily reversible'. Rather, the proposal would be a permanent incursion on the historic estate landscape associated with Corsley House. The

development would encroach upon important channelled views towards the south and weaken the unspoiled nature of the historic parkland estate. Consequently, the proposal would fail to preserve the setting of the listed building and cause harm to its significance and special interest.

17. This runs counter to the statutory provisions of Section 66(1) of the Act and conflicts with Core Policy CP58, which seeks to conserve, and where possible enhance, designated heritage assets and their settings. The degree of harm to the designated heritage asset would be less than substantial, which should be weighed against the public benefits.

Planning balance and public benefits

18. The appeal scheme is largely predicated on reducing noise and disturbance associated with vehicles using the A362. I have considered carefully the appellant's noise report although my own experience and that of the Council's officers casts doubt over its findings. Furthermore, the efficacy of the bund in achieving tranquillity has not been convincingly proven, especially considering that noise from cars passing along Deep Lane and associated with light aircraft overhead would remain. The proposed bund may offer some, periodic, abatement of noise emanating from the A362. However, as already stated, this noise does not diminish the special qualities of the area, nor the significance of Corsley House. Even if a 5dB reduction in noise experienced could be achieved by the bund, it would be largely to the satisfaction of private wants and not of public benefit.
19. There would also be some economic benefits associated with the construction phase and relative employment for its duration. There would be some ecological benefits, although largely in mitigation for the proposal. The planting of trees and other ecological measures could be implemented without necessitating the harm from the proposal. The public right of way CORY37 (PROW) currently terminates awkwardly. Whilst there would be benefits to the route, the bund would detract from users' experience of the local landscape. Moreover, the realignment of the PROW does not rely on the development per se, and the benefits of moving it to the site's western boundary could be realised without it, reducing the weight I attach to this as a public benefit.
20. On the other hand, there would be substantial harm to the character and appearance of the area, landscape and heritage asset designations. Even cumulatively, the sum of public benefits are not sufficient to outweigh the great negative weight that less than substantial harm to the Grade II listed Corsley House and to the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB carry. On balance, the proposal would fail to achieve sustainable development of the purposes of the Framework. Whilst there is some support for the proposals by local residents, there are not material considerations sufficient to justify the harms identified.

Conclusion

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

H Porter

INSPECTOR