



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 September 2020

by S. Rennie BSc (Hons), BA (Hons), MA, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 October 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/20/3253825

**2 Lane End Cottages, Ermin Street, Woodlands St Mary, Berkshire
RG17 7BH**

- 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 and Mrs Mizzi against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref 19/02878/HOUSE, dated 18 November 2019, was refused by notice dated 4 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of the existing outbuilding and replacement outbuilding.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area, its wider landscape, and the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

3. The proposal is for a new outbuilding with two storeys to the rear of the semi-detached pair of cottages within the garden area, which are within a rural setting near a road junction.
4. The site is also within the North Wessex Downs AONB, which is a large rural area which includes chalk downland and has been designated due to its natural beauty. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires that great weight be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other such designations, which have a high status of protection in relation to these issues.
5. The existing timber clad outbuilding is of a basic design and it appears in a dilapidated state. This is to be removed, with the proposed replacement outbuilding set back further into the site, further from the woodland opposite the access. Whilst there would not be any net increase in the number of outbuildings within this plot, the proposed replacement would be significantly taller and bulkier than the existing. The replacement outbuilding would have two storeys, whereas the existing is one storey.

6. The existing outbuilding has a low profile within the plot and is therefore less prominent than the proposed replacement, which is likely to be viewed more readily from outside of the plot, therefore. The proposed outbuilding would be set back further from the access point, but it would still be visible at a relatively short distance from this public road, especially through the wide access.
7. The height and form of the proposed outbuilding makes it particularly large for such a structure. The dormers would also add to the volume and visible bulk of the outbuilding. Furthermore, it would not be of a design and appearance which would reflect the adjacent semi-detached pair of dwellings. While this is not always necessary for an outbuilding it does add to the visual prominence of the proposed building due to its stark contrast in appearance with the adjacent semi-detached pair.
8. This site is within an area where the openness in this rural landscape, in contrast with the adjacent woodland, is a key characteristic of this downland area. Currently the semi-detached houses are set within large spacious plots which positively reflects and contributes to this open landscape setting. The existing outbuilding has very little impact in reducing this sense of openness, due to its inconspicuous low height. However, the much taller and bulkier two storey outbuilding would be a far more prominent addition and would have a negative impact of eroding some of the visual openness of the site within this landscape setting.
9. I acknowledge the appellant's comments as to the design and build quality of the proposed building and the intention to improve the appearance of the site, but to my mind the scale and design of the proposed outbuilding would be overly conspicuous as a new substantial sized building within the landscape, which is particularly sensitive to change. The existing outbuilding, due to its low profile, does not have such a visual impact within the landscape.
10. I am not persuaded that existing landscaping would be sufficient to adequately screen the development and mitigate its visual impacts. Furthermore, any proposed landscaping (to which I have no substantive detail) would not likely be sufficient, in my view, to mitigate the proposal adequately, especially given its height and proximity to the boundary. There may also be other buildings or structures in the area which have a negative visual impact within the landscape, but overall, this is an area of scenic beauty and new development should have regard to this in their design and siting.
11. Overall, whilst there have been outbuildings approved elsewhere in this District, in this case the scale and the height of the proposed outbuilding is such that it would be of a significantly greater visual impact than the existing outbuilding. The proposal would have the effect of harmfully eroding some of the openness of this part of the landscape with such a sizable outbuilding being introduced. This landscape is part of the designated AONB. Due to this visual harm to this landscape, the proposal cannot be regarded as conserving the scenic beauty of the AONB, as required by the Framework.
12. I recognise that the proposal would include the demolition of the existing shed, which may have some visual benefits and also help with parking and turning, but the removal of this building could potentially be achieved without the need for the proposed outbuilding, to which I have concluded would result a significant adverse impact.

13. The proposed outbuilding could potentially result in some light spill within this rural landscape and AONB. However, being a proposed outbuilding within the curtilage of an existing house I have no substantive evidence before me that the level of light spill from the proposed development would have a discernible adverse impact within this setting.
14. Considering all the above, the proposal is harmful to the character and appearance of the area, its wider landscape, and the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The proposal is therefore contrary to policies C3 and C6 of the Housing Site Allocations DPD, policies ADPP5, CS14 and CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026), which require development to conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness, sense of place and setting of the AONB; be of a high quality design that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area; and to have regard to the landscape character of the area and its sensitivity to change; amongst other things.
15. I note the proposals to increase the biodiversity at the site and keep honeybees also. I also recognise that there has been an issue with fly tipping at the site which the appellant is seeking to address. There would also be some benefits from the construction of the outbuilding and in meeting the needs of the house occupier. However, I do not regard all these benefits as being necessarily dependant on the development of an outbuilding of the size and form proposed. Furthermore, any such benefits highlighted by the appellant do not outweigh the harm I have identified.

Conclusion

16. As a result of the significant and demonstrable harm to the character and appearance of the area and the quality landscape of the designated AONB, and having considered all matters raised, the appeal should be dismissed.

S. Rennie

INSPECTOR