



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 November 2020

by B Davies MSc FGS CGeol

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/W/20/3257258

Land to the rear of Hut 60, Queens Road, Bisley Camp, Brookwood, GU24 ONP

- 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 Wimbledon Common Rifle Club against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20/P/00856, dated 22 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 14 July 2020.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a rifle clubhouse accommodation block.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

2. The appeal site is located in the Metropolitan Green Belt. Accordingly, the main issues are:
 - whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework and development plan policy;
 - the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area; and,
 - if the development would be inappropriate, whether the harm to the Green Belt by way of inappropriateness and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify it.

Reasons

Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development

3. Policy P2 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan: Strategy and Sites (2015 – 2034)(adopted April 2019) (LP) requires that development in the Green Belt is controlled according to paragraph 145 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) (Framework). This states that construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt with few exceptions, one

- of which is the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, as long as these preserve the openness of the Green Belt.
4. The proposed development would provide 2 bedrooms to be used on a short-term basis in conjunction with the nearby Wimbledon Common Rifle clubhouse, which was in the process of being constructed during my visit to the site. The permission¹ for the clubhouse was granted on the basis that it was an appropriate facility for outdoor sport.
 5. The Council stated on a recent and nearby application² that due to the multi-day length of events on the wider Bisley Camp site throughout the year there is a reasonable requirement for overnight accommodation to facilitate the sport. I have nothing before me to suggest that the Wimbledon Common Rifle Club would not be participating in such events. On this basis, I consider that short-term accommodation linked to shooting would provide an appropriate facility for outdoor sport and recreation in the Green Belt.
 6. However, the facility must be appropriate for the intended purpose. It is not clear to me that the central third of the proposed building would be used for accommodation, including a disproportionately large hall, a substantial storage area, and an empty mezzanine structure above this.
 7. The justification provided for a one and a half storey building is twofold. The first reason is that extra height is required to hang medal boards, but no explanation is provided as to why this must be sited in a small accommodation block, rather than more typically in the clubhouse. The second reason is that this structure provides the optimum height and angle for solar panels, but no further details are provided to justify this, and I am therefore unable to give this factor much weight. I note reference to a kitchenette in the statement, but this is not consistent with the plans provided and I have therefore not included this in my assessment. For these reasons, I am not satisfied that the proposed building is entirely appropriate for short-term accommodation.
 8. There are significant differences between the appeal site and the recent permission for the RAFSAA². Although the latter provides 20 bed spaces, not only is it a replacement building, but the plans show an efficiently designed, fully utilised, single-storey, barracks-style block, which is appropriate in design for short-term shooting parties. A second permission³ brought to my attention at the Former Sergeants Mess Dining Hall was for re-use of an existing building for accommodation, although I note that as this was granted under an earlier policy, it did not necessarily have to be for the purposes of shooting. However, I am not in disagreement with the inference that this demonstrates a need for accommodation linked with the sport of shooting. The third site⁴ was for erection of a 2-storey hotel on the wider site, but the Council is clear that this was only acceptable because of the public benefit from provision of facilities during the Commonwealth Games, which constituted very special circumstances.
 9. Although I conclude that overnight accommodation would be an appropriate facility for outdoor sport and recreation, in this case the building is not appropriate for its intended purpose. The proposal would therefore be

¹ 19/P/00696 and 19/P/00670 (September 2019)

² Royal Air Force Small Arms Association 19/P01716 (January 2020)

³ 08/P/01730 (December 2008)

⁴ 06/P/01416 (September 2006)

inappropriate development in the Green Belt, in conflict with the Framework and Policy P2 of the LP.

The effect on openness

10. The appeal site is on the boundary between the commercial and recreational area that comprises Bisley Camp, and the wooded, semi-rural residential area beyond this. The proposal would introduce built mass in a previously undeveloped area of the Green Belt, beyond the current lines of development on the camp and the immediate cluster of buildings. The site is constrained by buildings on 2 sides and is vegetated along much of the remaining boundary, which would reduce the visual impact of the loss of openness. Notwithstanding this, the proposal would lead to encroachment into the undeveloped area, albeit on a small scale, which would lead to a loss of openness.
11. With respect to the RAFSAA building, the proposed block was tightly constrained between higher buildings on either side, and although larger than the original structure, was essentially for the replacement of existing accommodation. It was therefore judged to preserve the openness of the Green Belt, a conclusion with which I have no reason to disagree.
12. For the reasons above, the proposal would cause encroachment of built form into an undeveloped area and would therefore not preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

Character and appearance

13. The distance between Hut 60 and the appeal site will be reduced to approximately 4 metres when permission⁵ for a rear extension is implemented. As the buildings are closely linked and in a small cluster, I do not consider this to result in harmful over development of the site. I did not observe that backland development is common in the area, but given the large variety of building configurations, I do not find this to be notably out of character.
14. For these reasons, I do not find harm to the character and appearance of the area and therefore no conflict with Policy D1 of the LP, nor Policy G5 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan (2003)⁶ which together require that development reflects the distinct local character and takes account of good design.

Other considerations

15. Policy E6 of the LP states that the Council will support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit business, communities and visitors. The proposal would potentially increase the contribution that sport makes to quality of life, and social and cultural well-being in the area. In addition, the activity associated with the site would contribute to the local economy, including during construction. However, the small scale of the development means that the benefits from these factors would be modest.

Other matters

16. I have noted third party concerns regarding potential for the building to be used as a private dwelling. I have not considered this further because it would require a separate planning permission.

⁵ 20/P/00122

⁶ Saved by CLG Direction on 24 September 2007

17. The Council has assessed potential loss of privacy and light to nearby residential properties and concluded that there would be no harm in these respects. Based on the information before me, I have no reason to disagree with this conclusion.
18. The site is within the 400 metre Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area. As I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons, I have not considered it necessary to undertake an Appropriate Assessment.
19. The site is not in the Bisley Camp Conservation Area, but in proximity. The appeal site is behind a large, modern warehouse building, which would block views from and into the conservation area. I therefore do not find that there would be any harm to the conservation area, nor its setting.
20. There is debate between the parties as to whether the appeal site is undeveloped land or in commercial or recreational use. I have assessed the appeal based on the proposal for a new accommodation block linked to recreational use and, for this reason, have not considered it necessary to consider whether this would constitute a change of use in principle.

Planning balance and conclusion

21. Although I have not found harm to the character and appearance of the area from the proposal, the building would not be appropriate for its intended purpose and would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt. It would therefore be inappropriate development at this location, which is a matter that I afford substantial weight in the planning balance.
22. I conclude that the harm to the Green Belt by way of inappropriateness would not be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify it. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

B Davies

INSPECTOR