
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 December 2020

by Benjamin Clarke BA (Hons.) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: Tuesday, 12 January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/V1505/W/20/3246994

Land adjacent to Woodlands, Branksome Avenue, Wickford, Essex

- 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 B. Cole against the decision of Basildon District Council.
 - The application Ref: 19/01470/FULL, dated 26 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 30 December 2019.
 - The development proposed is a new three-bedroom chalet bungalow on an infill plot.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The appeal site is described on the application form as 'land adjacent Greenacres, Branksome Avenue, Wickford', but on the appeal form as 'land adjacent to Woodlands, Branksome Avenue, Wickford, Essex'. I have used the latter description in the interests of precision.
3. References are made in the appeal documentation to the emerging Revised Publication Local Plan. However, I am unable to give this matter full weight as the findings of the examination in public are awaited.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal is inappropriate development for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and development plan policy;
 - The effect of the development upon the openness of the Green Belt; and
 - if the development is inappropriate, whether the harm by reason 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 the development.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

5. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) regards the erection of new buildings within the Green Belt as generally being inappropriate. There are some exceptions to this, however, the proposed development does not

relate to agriculture or forestry; outdoor sports and recreation; is not an extension or replacement building and does not represent a redevelopment of previously developed land. The evidence also does not indicate that the proposal would be made available on affordable tenures.

6. The Framework does state that the erection of a new dwelling as a limited infill within a village might not be considered inappropriate. The proposed development would be sited within a row of existing dwellings of differing sizes and designs. In addition, there are some dwellings located on the opposite side of the road. An additional building is located to the rear of the site. In consequence, the proposed dwelling would be sited amongst other buildings. Therefore, the proposed development would represent a limited infill.
7. In result, it is key to establish whether the appeal site is located within a village. A village is not a term defined within the Framework and I have not been directed towards any locally adopted definition. In consequence, I have made an assessment based upon the individual appeal site and its own surroundings.
8. Whilst there are a notable number of dwellings within the surrounding area, some of the evidence before me describes the vicinity of the appeal site as being of a sporadic and plotland nature. In consequence, dwellings are located irregular distances apart from one another, are sited different distances back from the highway edge and are constructed to varying designs. In consequence, the surrounding area contains a great variety in built form, with limited relationships between buildings.
9. In addition, the appeal site is accessed from Branksome Avenue. This is reached from Sugden Avenue. Other roads lead from Branksome Avenue. The absence of public highways is also not a feature of most villages. In addition, the estate's only connection with the wider highway network is from Sugden Avenue. This singular road connection is also not typically associated with the form and layout of most villages.
10. In addition, whilst the appeal site would be near to a number of other dwellings, there are a limited number of other land uses or communal facilities within the immediate vicinity that might support residents in their day to day needs. Whilst such uses might be relatively limited in some villages, the lack of variety is not indicative of the appeal site being within a village.
11. Whilst the proposal is close to the edge of Wickford, residents would still need to travel some distance in order to access the services and facilities that they are reasonably likely to require on a day-to-day basis.
12. Therefore, given these specific circumstances, I conclude that the proposed development would not represent a limited infill within a village. It therefore represents an inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The proposal, in this regard, would conflict with the Framework. Amongst other matters, this seeks to avoid the erection of new buildings within the Green Belt, unless it adheres to specified criteria.

Effect on openness

13. The appeal site features several dwellings within the immediate surroundings. The proposal would be sited broadly in line with these existing buildings, which are of differing designs and scales. The site is also within the Green Belt.

14. The proposed development would increase the level of built form within the vicinity owing to the proposed dwelling and garage. Whilst some screening would be offered by the existing buildings, this effect would be limited as the development would be clearly visible from Branksome Avenue. In consequence, the increase in built form would be readily apparent and prominent.
15. In addition, as a domestic dwelling, there is a likelihood that the future residents of the development would potentially require additional items within the garden. Such items of domestic paraphernalia, in addition to the built form of the dwelling and parking of vehicles to the front of the site have the potential to erode the physical character of openness that is a feature of the Green Belt.
16. Whilst I acknowledge that the proposed development would be near to other dwellings a feature of the surrounding area is that groups of dwellings are punctuated by occasional gaps. Such an arrangement gives the area a more open and less developed character.
17. In result, the infilling of the existing gap at this location would erode the spatial sense of openness that is intrinsic to the Green Belt. Furthermore, the existing developments do not have the same effect on the Green Belt as the appeal scheme would have.
18. For these reasons, I conclude that the proposed development would erode the level of openness within the Green Belt. The proposal, in this regard, would conflict with the requirements of the Framework. Amongst other matters, this seeks to ensure that new developments maintain the physical and spatial character of openness in the Green Belt.

Other considerations

19. The proposed development would result in an increase in the local housing supply. However, as the proposed development would result in an adverse effect on the Green Belt, the provisions of paragraph 11(d) of the Framework do not apply. Furthermore, the increase to the local housing supply would be limited by reason of the scale of the development. In consequence, this matter can only be given a limited amount of weight.
20. The construction process would generate some economic benefits, however, owing to the scale of the development such benefits would be small, relatively short term in duration and localised in impact. In result, this can also only be given a limited amount of weight.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

21. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Substantial weight should be given to this harm. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
22. As explained above, I give only limited weight to each of the considerations cited in support of the proposal and accordingly I do not find that these amount to the special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

23. In consequence, and for the preceding reasons, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Benjamin Clarke

INSPECTOR