



## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 December 2020

**by S Edwards MA MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 27 January 2021**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/20/3259156**

**The Old Golf House, Rectory Road, Streatley, Reading RG8 9QA**

- 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 Doctors Nicola Swan and Trevor Long against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
  - The application Ref 20/00835/FULD, dated 1 April 2020, was refused by notice dated 3 June 2020.
  - The development proposed is subdivision of The Old Golf House and annex into two separate residential dwellings.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is allowed, and planning permission is granted for subdivision of The Old Golf House and annex into two separate residential dwellings, at The Old Golf House, Rectory Road, Streatley, Reading RG8 9QA, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 20/00835/FULD, dated 1 April 2020, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the attached Schedule of Conditions.

### Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
  - whether the proposal is suitably located, having regard to national and local planning policies, which seek to restrict residential development in the countryside; and
  - the effect on the rural character and appearance of the area, including the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

### Reasons

#### *Location*

3. Located within an area of rural character and immediately adjacent to the car park of Streatley, the appeal site comprises a detached dwelling and a large annexe set within spacious grounds. The annexe building, which includes a double garage associated with the main house, was granted planning permission in 2004, subject to a number of conditions, which notably prevent its use as a separate dwelling. By reason of its proximity to the host property, the annexe shares the domestic curtilage of the Old Golf House, having notably regard to the garden wall, gate and patio located between the adjacent buildings. There is no doubt that the two buildings form a single planning unit, with a single primary use as a dwellinghouse.

4. At the time of my site visit, the main property remained unoccupied, whilst the annexe building clearly appeared to be lived in. The appeal scheme would entail the subdivision of the existing planning unit to form two separate residential dwellings. It includes a number of modest internal and external alterations to facilitate the proposed development, as well as forms of boundary treatment to formally create two separate plots.
5. Policy ADPP1 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Development Plan Document<sup>1</sup> (CS) sets out the spatial strategy for the area administered by the Council. It seeks to focus most development within the main urban areas, and in accordance with the established settlement strategy. This is emphasised further by Policy C1 of the West Berkshire District Council Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD)<sup>2</sup>, which sets out a presumption against new residential development outside of the settlement boundaries. This approach is considered broadly consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), by seeking to direct residential development towards the most sustainable and accessible locations.
6. CS Policy ADPP5 permits the provision of housing within the North Wessex Downs AONB in certain circumstances. These include infill development and development on previously developed land, in the form of housing allocations focused on the rural service centres and service villages located within the AONB. The appeal proposal relates to the conversion of an existing building and would not meet any of the exceptions envisaged by Policy ADPP5.
7. Despite its proximity to the settlement boundary of Streatley, the appeal site lies, for planning policy purposes, within the open countryside, where only appropriate limited development will be allowed, focused on addressing identified needs and maintaining a strong rural economy. Although the proposal for a separate residential dwelling in this location would not accord with the Council's spatial strategy, the conflict with DPD Policy C1 and CS Policies ADPP1 and ADPP5 would however be limited, since the annexe building is already in residential use, albeit linked to the Old Golf House.
8. Due to the site's relatively remote location, it is highly likely that future occupiers of the development would be heavily reliant on private motor vehicles to access most day-to-day services and facilities. Whilst it is accepted that some of the vehicular movements would have previously been made jointly with the occupier(s) of the Old Golf House, the occupation of the annexe would have also inevitably generated a number of separate journeys. In that particular regard, the use of the appeal buildings as two separate dwellings would therefore not be significantly different to the permitted arrangement. Furthermore, paragraph 103 of the Framework provides that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary from urban to rural areas and that should be taken into account in decision-making.
9. The main parties have referred to DPD Policy C4, which permits the conversion of existing redundant buildings in the countryside to residential use, subject to a number of criteria. The policy places explicitly the onus on applicants to provide evidence that the building is genuinely redundant. Although redundancy is not clearly defined by Policy C4, the supporting text nevertheless explains that for a building to be considered redundant, it is important that the

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted July 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Adopted May 2017.

original use of the building for that purpose no longer exists. Although the appellants may not have any use for the Old Golf House presently, it nevertheless has an authorised use and is capable of being used as such. Accordingly, and in the absence of substantive evidence to the contrary, the appeal premises cannot be regarded as redundant or disused for the purposes of DPD Policy C4, which is therefore not directly relevant to the proposal before me.

10. On this issue, I conclude that there would be some conflict with CS Policies ADPP1 and ADPP5 and DPD Policy C1. However, for the reasons detailed above, the appeal site would, in this particular instance, constitute an appropriate location for the appeal scheme, as there are sufficient considerations in favour of the proposal which justify taking a decision other than in accordance with the development plan.

#### *Character and appearance*

11. As previously noted, the site lies within an area of rural character. The appeal buildings overlook open fields and form part of a frontage primarily characterised by linear development. The appeal scheme affects existing buildings, which are of a suitable size to enable their use as separate dwellings. The proposal includes a number of alterations to both buildings, which are considered of an acceptable design, notably to ensure that the living conditions of future occupiers are not adversely affected as a result of the development.
12. The Council is however concerned that the subdivision of the site into two separate plots would be out of keeping with the character of the area. Whilst the buildings would remain within close proximity to each other, they would otherwise sit within spacious plots, which would therefore not detract from the established pattern of development along Rectory Road. The proposed development includes the planting of beech hedgerows to subdivide the appeal site, as well as a section of brick wall and wooden fence immediately between the two buildings. Furthermore, no new vehicular access would be required for the new dwelling, as it is proposed to use the access which has been previously granted planning permission for the parking of a tractor. The two dwellings would therefore benefit from separate access arrangements.
13. The subdivision of the site would inevitably lead to increased domestic paraphernalia. However, the size of the plots and the degree of screening afforded by existing landscaping would ensure that the effect of the development on the rural character and appearance of the area, and the North Wessex Downs AONB, remains minimal, including when viewed from the nearby public footpath.
14. For these reasons, I am satisfied that the proposed development would not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area, and would conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Accordingly, I find no conflict with CS Policies ADPP1 and ADPP5, DPD Policies CS14, CS19 and C3 which, amongst other things, seek to ensure that development proposals are of a high quality, whilst conserving and enhancing the diversity and local distinctiveness of the District's landscape character.

## **Other Matters**

15. The Council has drawn my attention to a number of appeal decisions. However, the characteristics of each site and settlement are different. Having regard to the available information, I am therefore not certain that the circumstances of these appeals constitute a direct parallel to the proposal before me, which I am required to assess on its individual merits.

## **Planning Balance**

16. The Council's submissions indicate that it is able to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites, and there is no substantive evidence suggesting otherwise. However, the existence of a five-year housing land supply does not place an upper limit on the numbers of dwellings that can be permitted. As set out above, on account of the particular nature of the development, the limited conflict with the spatial strategy, but also the absence of harm to the character and appearance of the area, the Council's ability to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply does not, in my view, provide sufficient justification for withholding consent. It is the particular circumstances of the proposal which render the scheme acceptable.

## **Conditions**

17. I have considered the conditions suggested by the Council, making minor amendments where necessary, to ensure compliance with the tests as set out within paragraph 55 of the Framework and the National Planning Practice Guidance<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the standard time limit, I shall impose conditions specifying the relevant drawings which the development must accord with, in the interests of certainty and to provide clarity. Conditions regarding external materials, soft and hard landscaping details are required to preserve the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings.
18. I am satisfied that, in order to protect the character and appearance of the area, and the wider landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB, a condition restricting the permitted development rights of the annexe is considered necessary. It would not however be considered reasonable to withdraw the permitted development rights which are currently enjoyed by the Old Golf House, and I have therefore amended the wording of the condition accordingly.
19. I shall also impose a condition requiring an electric vehicle charging point to be provided for the new dwelling, which is considered necessary to help reducing carbon emissions and encourage the use of more sustainable modes of private transport. However, as there are adequate access and parking arrangements for the new dwelling, the imposition of an additional condition in that regard is considered unnecessary.

## **Conclusion**

20. For the above reasons, I find that there are material considerations in favour of the proposal, which would outweigh the harm arising from the limited conflict with the development. Having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach set out in the Framework, and all other relevant matters, I

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<sup>3</sup> Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 21a-003-20190723.

conclude that the appeal is allowed.

*S Edwards*

INSPECTOR

#### SCHEDULE OF CONDITIONS

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 3674/200 Rev.B, 3674/205.
- 3) The materials to be used in the external finishes of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing buildings in colour, size and texture, and retain as such thereafter.
- 4) The occupation of the Old Golf House and Annexe building as separate dwellings shall not take place until a detailed soft landscaping scheme has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The soft landscaping scheme shall include detailed plans, planting and retention schedule, programme of works, and any other supporting information. All planting, seeding or turfing comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; and any trees or plants which within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species.
- 5) The occupation of the buildings as separate dwellings shall not take place until the hard landscaping of the site has been completed in accordance with a hard landscaping scheme that has first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The hard landscaping scheme shall include details of any boundary treatments (e.g. walls, fences) and hard surfaced areas (e.g. driveways, paths, patios, decking) to be provided as part of the development.
- 6) The occupation of the buildings as separate dwellings shall not take place until an electric vehicle charging point has been provided for the new dwelling in accordance with details that have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The charging point shall be maintained, and kept available and operational for electric vehicles thereafter.
- 7) Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (or any Order revoking, re-enacting or modifying that Order), no alterations to the external appearance of the converted annexe, and no extensions, buildings, walls, fences or other development which would otherwise be permitted by Schedule 2, Part 1 (Classes A, B, C, D or E) or Part 2 (Class A) of that Order shall be carried out without planning

permission being granted by the Local Planning Authority pursuant to an application made for that purpose.

END OF SCHEDULE