



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 18 May 2021

by John Dowsett MA DipURP Dip UD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26th July 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/A4520/W/21/3268841

Whitburn Golf Club, Lizard Lane, Whitburn NE34 7AF

- 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 Whitburn Golf Club against the decision of South Tyneside Council.
 - The application Ref: ST/0949/20/FUL, dated 9 November 2020, was refused by notice dated 1 February 2021.
 - The development proposed is described as: Single storey side extension to provide golf shop, swing studio and office to existing golf club. Relocate door to changing area.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed, and planning permission is granted for a single storey side extension to provide golf shop, swing studio and office to existing golf club and to relocate door to changing area at Whitburn Golf Club, Lizard Lane, Whitburn NE34 7AF in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref: ST/0949/20/FUL, dated 9 November 2020, subject to the following 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: 1:1250 Location Plan; Site Plan 1:500 Existing; Site Plan 1:500 Proposed; Drawing No.1 (Proposed Elevations and Section); and Drawing No. 0770/8666/404 (Existing Elevations and Plan and Proposed Plan).
 - 3) The materials used on the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall be of similar appearance, colour, and texture to those of the exterior of the existing building.

Preliminary Matters

2. On 20 July 2021, the Government published a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework. The policies in the previous version of the Framework relating to the Green Belt are carried over unchanged into the revised version and neither party relies on any other provisions of the Framework within their respective cases. I have determined the appeal based on the policies in the revised Framework.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this appeal is whether the proposed development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to the revised Framework and any relevant development plan policies.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located within the Green Belt to the south of South Shields where Policy EA1 of the South Tyneside Core Strategy 2007 (the Core Strategy) seeks to ensure that the openness of the Green Belt is to be preserved and enhanced.
5. Paragraph 149 of the Framework sets out that the construction of new buildings is inappropriate in the Green Belt apart from certain specific exceptions. These include: the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it; and the extension or alteration of a building, provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
6. The appeal scheme proposes an extension to the existing clubhouse building associated with Whitburn Golf Club to provide a golf professionals shop, office, and a swing studio where golf tuition would be undertaken. The clubhouse building has a two storey central section with a single storey element to each side of the central section. The appeal proposal would add a single storey extension to the south east end of the building, approximately 8.3 metres by 8.3 metres, with a pitched roof of the same height and pitch as the existing roof on this part of the building.
7. The Council argue that the proposed development would not provide appropriate facilities for outdoor sport as the swing studio would be used to teach golf and help customers choose appropriate golf clubs and the shop would sell golf clubs and associated golfing items. I saw when I visited the site that there is currently a golf professionals shop located within the existing building. I have also noted the appellant's comments that the swing studio could not be accommodated in existing available accommodation within the current building due to the height requirements for the facility.
8. Whilst I accept that, theoretically, the proposed uses to be accommodated within the extension could be located elsewhere, for example in a suitable building in the town centre, the exception in the Framework is for appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land, or a change of use) for outdoor sport. The clubhouse is part of an existing and well established golf course and currently provides facilities for players on the golf course, including a golf professionals shop, which would be relocated to the new extension. From the appellant's evidence, the swing studio would be used for training purposes for both existing and new players, in addition to the fitting of golf clubs. This, to my mind, has an indisputable practical and functional link to the use of the land as a golf course and the Council's interpretation of both the proposed function of the extension and the relevant exception in the Framework is, in my view, overly literal.
9. Consequently, I find that the proposed extension would provide appropriate facilities for an existing use for outdoor sport. This exception is subject to the development preserving the openness of the Green Belt and not conflicting with the purposes of including land within it.
10. The golf course occupies an elevated position to the south of the built up area of South Shields and lies to both sides of Lizard Lane, with the clubhouse and its associated car park sited on the east side within a shallow dip in the road.

Immediately to the rear of the clubhouse and carpark, the landform falls away very sharply into the extensive workings of Marsden Quarry, although these are screened from the car park and from Lizard Lane to the south by a raised bund. Adjacent to the south end of the car park is a single storey dwelling and a short distance to the north of the appeal site and on the same side of the road is a small group of buildings in use as a riding school.

11. The presence of the golf course to the west of the road results in a very open, yet managed, appearance to the landscape although there is a small nature reserve within an abandoned quarry to the north, between the golf course and the built up area of South Shields. The landscape is gently rolling and slopes generally eastwards towards the sea cliffs on the coast and rises inland to the west. To the south of the golf course and quarry are agricultural fields and the landform slopes downwards towards the village of Whitburn.
12. When considering the effect on openness, there is both a spatial and visual component. In purely spatial terms, the proposed development would reduce the openness of the Green Belt by introducing additional built development, albeit small in scale, where previously there was none. However, this has to be taken in the context of the proposal being an extension to an existing building that is set within a large car park and which is seen in conjunction with a further single storey building to the south and a group of buildings a short distance to the north. The current clubhouse building has a long, linear, façade that runs roughly parallel to Lizard Lane. Whilst the proposal would lengthen this façade by approximately 8 metres, this would have little or no additional effect on the openness of the area in visual terms over and above that of the current, existing, building. With this in mind, I find that, overall, the proposal would have a neutral effect on the openness of the Green Belt.
13. Paragraph 138 of the Framework sets out that Green Belt serves five purposes. Whilst this part of the Green Belt forms an enclave of generally open land between the settlements of South Shields, Whitburn, Cleadon and Sunderland, due to the small scale of the proposed development and the fact that it is an extension to an existing building, it cannot be considered as contributing to the sprawl of a built up area. Nor would it result in the merging of neighbouring towns or represent encroachment into the countryside. It is not suggested that the proposal would affect the setting of a historic town and there is no evidence that it would hinder urban regeneration.
14. Although the Council have argued that the proposed extension would result in a disproportionate addition to the original building, it is only necessary for the proposal to meet one of the relevant exemptions in Paragraph 149 of the Framework. Consequently, I have not considered this latter point further.
15. I therefore find that the proposed development would not be inappropriate development within the Green Belt. It would comply with the relevant requirements of the Framework and Core Strategy Policy EA1.

Other Matters

16. The Council have not raised any other issues or objections in respect of the proposed development and has not suggested that it conflicts with any other policies in the development plan. From what I have read and from what I saw when I visited the site, I have no reason to find differently.

17. I have had regard to the points raised by an interested party in respect of the loss of car parking provision at the clubhouse. The golf club currently has an extensive car park and whilst this was relatively well used at the time of my site visit, I recognise that there will also be times when there is a higher demand for parking. I saw that the proposed extension would not result in the direct loss of any formally marked out parking spaces as the area that it would occupy is currently used as circulation space rather than for the parking of vehicles. The extension may potentially make two nearby spaces less convenient to use. However, there is no substantive evidence before me that would indicate that this would result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety. Consequently, this would not be sufficient reason to withhold permission. I also note that the Council have not raised any concerns in respect of highway safety.

Conditions

18. I have had regard to the list of conditions that have been suggested by the Council. To provide certainty regarding what has been granted planning permission, I have included a condition specifying the approved drawings. In the interests of the appearance of the existing building and the surrounding area, it is also necessary to attach a condition requiring that the external materials used on the proposed extension match those of the existing building.

Conclusion

19. For the above reasons, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

John Dowsett

INSPECTOR