



Appeal Decision

Hearing Held on 3 August 2021

Site visit made on 9 August 2021

by Philip Major BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 26/08/2021

Appeal Ref: APP/P1615/W/20/3265384

Land at Hartpury College, Hartpury GL19 3BE

- 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 Hartpury University against the decision of Forest of Dean District Council.
 - The application Ref: P0787/19/FUL, dated 15 May 2019, was refused by notice dated 24 June 2020.
 - The development proposed is the erection of three student accommodation blocks providing 165 bedrooms, with associated car parking and landscape works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background

2. Hartpury University and College is a well established and successful further and higher education establishment centred on a campus within rural Gloucestershire. It caters for a number of different land based study areas and many students and staff reside on campus. It is not in dispute that extra accommodation is required.
3. Although of no statutory force there is in place a Hartpury Masterplan dating from 2008. Further iterations were prepared in succeeding years but have not been taken forward. The Masterplan sets out a broad vision for the future development of the campus, but is not prescriptive. Part of the Masterplan deals with landscape, and identifies sensitivity zones. The appeal site is located in an area described as being of high landscape sensitivity. However, I agree with the Appellant that the justification for that assessment is at best unclear as it seems to be based largely on the perception that the appeal site is part of the parkland setting of Hartbury House. I agree that the evidence in this case is that the appeal site is not part of the parkland, and probably never was. The Masterplan is a material consideration to be taken into consideration, but because of its age and the lack of clear justification for its landscape conclusions I afford it limited weight.
4. The core reasons why the Council refused planning permission relate to the location and design of the development. The development plan, which includes the Core Strategy (CS) of 2012 and the Allocations Plan (AP) of 2018, contain relevant policies. The most important for the determination of this proposal

include CS Policy CSP.1 and AP Policy AP4 which, taken together, seek to ensure that development respects the local environment, including its character, whilst promoting visually attractive design. In addition AP Policy AP13 is also most important. It deals specifically with Hartpury College. This is a permissive policy which seeks to support development where it accords with an agreed landscape strategy. The policy points out that development should accord with an agreed masterplan/landscape strategy.

Main Issue

5. The main issue in the appeal is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surroundings.

Reasons

6. As I have noted above, there is a Masterplan for the University/College which was drawn up some years ago. It has not been superseded and the draft iterations in later years carry no weight. Given that the Masterplan identified the appeal site as an area of high landscape sensitivity it would not be expected that development would take place there. To that extent the proposal is in conflict with the Masterplan. But the Masterplan is of limited weight and it is necessary to assess the proposal in a more robust manner.
7. The appeal site is perceived as being outside the main campus. This perception is brought about by 2 factors. The first is the strong focus of existing development to the north, separated from the site by a heavily vegetated and high bund. The second factor is that the site is clearly associated with the rural landscape to the south, towards which it slopes gently. There is a noticeable change in character between the campus to the north and the countryside to the south, located as they are on either side of the bund.
8. The countryside within which the appeal site lies forms an integral part of the rolling and deeply rural hinterland of the campus. It is clearly not part of the developed area to the north which has a very different character as a heavily developed educational establishment. Both are within a wider landscape classification at national and district level, but each retains a different and distinct localised character. The land has no formal designation but is attractive in its own right.
9. The 3 blocks of accommodation proposed would radically alter the character of the appeal site and its relationship with the land to the south. Breaching the bund and extending 3 storey development into what is currently undeveloped countryside would physically and perceptually extend the built form of the campus into a rural landscape. It would give the impression of buildings spilling out beyond the established southern extent of the University/College. This would change the nature and character of the locality and would introduce a strong urban influence which would be at odds with its surroundings. That change to character, even in a landscape which might not reach the degree of sensitivity suggested by the Masterplan, would be significantly harmful and in conflict with the thrust of the policies noted above.
10. In addition to the buildings themselves the associated car parking would bring an enhanced level of activity into this rural area. Though not as damaging as

the buildings this would add an additional degree of harm to the character of the area.

11. Visually the accommodation blocks would be somewhat bulkier and of greater scale than the existing blocks to the north. In being located beyond the existing bund they would be more prominent in views from the footpath to the south, and from footpaths on higher ground yet further to the south, and to the east. The proposed replacement bund would be far lower than that existing and, albeit that it would be intended to be heavily landscaped, would not be likely to be as successful in assimilating the proposal in its environment.
12. I do not need to address the entirety of the Appellant's landscape evidence but it is important to point out some aspects with which I disagree. For example, I consider that the value, susceptibility and sensitivity of the appeal site warrants greater than a judgement of 'medium'. I would put it at a medium to high level from most of the identified viewpoints. In addition I afford greater weight to the receptor value of some viewpoints such as No13, where walkers would be likely to be leaving the Murrell's End footpath links. This, in my judgement, is more appropriately assessed as of high value. In any event the degree of effects is assessed below a level I consider to be realistic, especially as a good proportion of intervening vegetation has now been removed to the south of the site. Overall it is my view that the effect of the proposal on both landscape character and visual amenity is more realistically assessed as being moderate to high, and adverse, from a number of the identified viewpoints.
13. I accept that there is design logic in the configuration of the blocks in relation to those existing and the following of a spine through the campus. Nonetheless, the breaking out of these large accommodation blocks into an undeveloped area to the south would be incongruous and unacceptably harmful to both the character and the appearance of the surroundings. In short, I agree with the Council's assessment that this is an unacceptable site for the proposed development.

Other Matters

14. I acknowledge that the University/College has a need for more accommodation. But that in itself is not sufficient to outweigh the harm I have identified. Whether or not other, previously approved, sites for similar development are still appropriate is not a matter for me. However, it is clear that the main focus of development at the campus has been further to the north, where several new buildings have been constructed in a manner which avoids 'breaking out' into open countryside.

Overall Conclusion

15. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Philip Major

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Mr P Goatley	Queen's Counsel
Mr N McLoughlin BSc(Hons) DipTP MRTPI	McLoughlin Planning
Mr A Cook BA(Hons) MLD CMLI MIEMA CENV	Pegasus Group
Mr A Williams BA(Hons) DipLA DipUD CMLI	Define

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Mr S Colegate	Forest of Dean District Council
Mr A Chapman	Forest of Dean District Council
Mr T Rosser-Smith	Forest of Dean District Council

INTERESTED PERSONS:

Dr S Huckvale	Local resident
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