
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 August 2022

by David Reed BSc DipTP DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13th September 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/W/22/3291651

Chilton Fields, South Row, Chilton, Didcot OX11 0RT

- 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 Katherine Orr against the decision of Vale of White Horse District Council.
 - The application Ref P21/V1630/FUL, dated 17 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 5 November 2021.
 - The development proposed is the provision of three units of visitor accommodation in connection with outdoor/rural pursuits together with associated parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including the effect on the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

3. The proposal, as amended during the course of the application¹, is for three wooden chalets, about 5.8 m by 4.5 m with a low-pitched roof, to be used as visitor accommodation on paddock land just to the south of Chilton within the North Wessex Downs AONB. The chalets would be served by a small parking area accessed by a short track from South Row which runs from the village into the open countryside where it links with the wider rights of way network. The chalet units would be used as holiday accommodation in connection with outdoor/rural pursuits but in the absence of effective controls potentially also for general visitor accommodation.
4. The site lies immediately outside the settlement boundary of the village as defined by the Chilton Neighbourhood Plan 2021 (the CNP) and hence in the surrounding countryside for planning policy purposes. In such locations Policy 31 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1 2016 (the VWHLP1) encourages small-scale development to advance the visitor economy 'provided that proposals are in keeping with the scale and character of the locality'. There is no dispute that the proposal is small in scale, but CNP Policy P2 requires development outside the settlement boundary to have regard to the downland character of the AONB and VWHLP1 Policies 37 and 44 seek high quality design

¹ The proposal was reduced from five units of accommodation. A stable building has also been withdrawn.

and conservation of the landscape. Consequently, these are the key considerations in the determination of this appeal.

5. Whilst the site lies adjacent to the built-up area of Chilton, the grounds of Kilbo and other low density residential properties just to the north are marked by extensive tree cover which forms a distinctive feature in the landscape. This is in stark contrast to the open landscape of fields bounded by low hedges and/or fences which characterise the exposed downland to the south. The boundary between the built-up village and its rural setting is therefore clear cut in this location, with the appeal site falling squarely within the latter.
6. The area falls within the 'Chilton to Blewbury Downs Open Farmland' Landscape Character Area (LCA) in the 2017 Vale of White Horse Landscape Character Assessment and the 'Blewbury Downs' LCA in the 2002 AONB Assessment. This is described as a large-scale landscape, often open and exposed, and the strategy is to conserve its open character, the sparsely settled ambience, and the overall sense of remoteness and tranquillity.
7. The three chalet buildings, whilst low profile, timber clad and well-spaced along the northern boundary of the site would significantly change the character of the existing paddock land. Built form would be introduced together with car parking and an access track. The chalets would have a residential appearance rather than being rural buildings for agricultural or equestrian use, and even as visitor accommodation would inevitably be accompanied by domestic features such as parked cars, patio furniture, refuse bins, perhaps barbeques and flower beds. At night light spillage from windows would be introduced into a currently dark location. Whilst the site could be landscaped to provide screening, this in itself would detrimentally change the character of the site from an unspoilt open field or paddock, and it is not clear how the extensive southern part of the appeal site would be managed with the chalets in place.
8. It is appreciated that the chalets would not be particularly visible from nearby rights of way, but an adverse impact on landscape character is not dependent on public visibility of the site. The appellant also draws attention to various recent permissions in the vicinity of the village at Skippetts Stables and Middle Paddock². Whilst these involve greater built development and a menage with floodlights respectively, equestrian development is a characteristic feature of the North Wessex Downs and it does not follow that visitor accommodation of the same scale is equally acceptable in the countryside.
9. However carefully designed and managed, the proposal would effectively expand the built-up area and represent a significant encroachment into the surrounding open countryside. This would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area, including the North Wessex Downs AONB, contrary to VWHLP1 Policies 31, 37 and 44 and CNP Policy P2 summarised above. The introduction of light spillage would also be contrary to CNP Policy P7 and VWHLP Part 2 2019 Policy 21 which resist lighting on the south side of Chilton and where there would be an adverse effect on the character of the area.

Conclusion

10. Whilst the proposal would have some economic benefits for the local area by generating visitor expenditure in local shops and facilities, this would be more

² P16/V1646/FUL, P19/V0624/FUL, P21/V1186/FUL, P15/V2054/FUL

than outweighed by the adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area, the conflict with development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework requirement to give great weight to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in the AONB.

11. Having regard to the above the appeal should be dismissed.

David Reed

INSPECTOR