



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 September 2022

by John Morrison BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 October 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/D3640/W/21/3284165

Adjacent Land North East Of Furze Farm, Lucas Green Road, West End, Woking, Surrey GU24 9LD

- 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 Ellie Backhurst against the decision of Surrey Heath Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/0692/FFU, dated 16 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 19 August 2021.
 - The development proposed is a change of use of land from agricultural to equestrian and erection of timber stable block comprising of 4 No stables, feed room, tack room, open covered hay store (retrospective).
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for a change of use of land from agricultural to equestrian and erection of timber stable block comprising of 4 No stables, feed room, tack room, open covered hay store (retrospective) at adjacent land north east of Furze Farm, West End, Woking, Surrey GU24 9LD in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 21/0692/FFU, dated 16 June 2021, subject to the following condition:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted is as shown on approved plans reference 2021/T07/01; 2021/T07/02 and 2021/T07/03.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the site address and description of development from the appeal form and decision notice since they, most accurately and concisely, identify the site and development for which planning permission is sought. Since the development subject of the appeal has been carried out, I have considered it as seeking retrospective planning permission.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the appeal scheme is inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Reasons

4. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The Framework¹ sets out, in regard to

¹ The National Planning Policy Framework 2021

development in the Green Belt, that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate. There are some exceptions set out in a closed list. These include, for the purposes of the appeal scheme, the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. In this case, an assessment of the effect of openness is intrinsically linked to whether a given development is inappropriate. The Framework is explicit in explaining that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

5. As development related to the keeping of horses, and the associated change of use of the land on which the stable block is located (as well as that around it), it appears to be common ground that such an activity can reasonably be accepted as being part of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation. Whilst preservation of the openness of the Green Belt is something of a binary test, with this exception falling under the construction of new buildings, it can equally be reasonably accepted that appropriate facilities can, and arguably in most cases would, involve the construction of buildings.
6. Taking into account the historic use of the wider site as a market garden, the keeping of horses on the land is an activity that preserves openness. The stable block is not an insignificantly scaled building but nonetheless clearly part of the site's activity. It is of utilitarian design, low rise and single storey. It is constructed of single skin timber panels with a cement sheet roof. For want of a better way of putting it, it is clearly a stable block and from what I observed on site, fairly related in scale to the number of horses being kept, along with associated feed and tac storage areas.
7. It has a secluded presence in the wider Green Belt, set against and partially amongst a dense tree belt with further landscaping to the wider appeal site boundaries. Whilst I am unsure of the historic use thereof, the evidence suggests that the hardstanding on which the block has been erected was pre existing. The building is contained entirely within it. The Council have expressed concerns about paraphernalia but on my appreciation of the appeal site as I observed it on my site visit, the enterprise on site consisted of a small number of grazing horses with all equipment etc stored in the building. Should it ever develop into an exercise area, any jumps or equipment related thereto would be eminently mobile. I fail to see therefore any direct harm arising out of such paraphernalia or wider 'intensification' of activity at the appeal site which may need express planning permission in any event.
8. Policy DM3 of the Local Plan² sets out specific criteria for the consideration of equestrian related development in the Green Belt. In regard thereto it seems sufficiently clear that the appeal scheme does not involve the re use of buildings for which the policy in any case suggests are approached 'in the first instance'. Where new buildings or ancillary development are justified, they should be well related to existing buildings and small in scale. In this case, the block is, contextually speaking, small in overall scale despite its length. It does find itself in amongst some polytunnels and other ground based structures and, in the wider sense, close to buildings associated with nearby Bayfield and Furze

² Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document 2012

Farm. The scheme is not a replacement building but, for the reasons I have set out above, its overall size, siting and scale is not harmful to the character and openness of the countryside or Green Belt for the purposes of Policy DM3.

9. Taking all of the above into account, in the context of the reasonable allowances for appropriate facilities, the appeal scheme preserves the openness of the Green Belt and, having regard to the five purposes of Green Belts as set out by paragraph 138 of the Framework, it does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. The appeal scheme is not therefore inappropriate development. Moreover, it complies with the development plan, Policy DM3 specifically, and its aims to reduce harm to the Green Belt in the manner I have set out.

Conditions

10. Since the development has been carried out, there is no need for a condition setting out the timescale for commencement. I am also satisfied that the design and finish of materials of the building as completed are acceptable. I have however, in accordance with the Council's suggestion, included a condition specifying the approved plans, amending its inference accordingly. I see no reason to include any other conditions.

Conclusion

11. The appeal scheme complies with the development plan. It should therefore succeed, subject to the condition set out above.

John Morrison

INSPECTOR