



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 March 2023

by Paul Jackson B Arch (Hons) RIBA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 March 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/W/22/3301143

Pirton Water Tower, Priors Hill, Pirton SG5 3QH

- 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 Colin and Linda Gore against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 21/03134/FP, dated 5 November 2021, was refused by notice dated 9 May 2022.
 - The development proposed is demolition of water tower and erection of dwelling.
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Preliminary matter

1. The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (LP) was adopted on 8 November 2022. Policies of the LP replace the saved policies of the 2007 Local Plan referred to in the reasons for refusal. The parties provided submissions on this matter and I have taken these into account.

Decision

2. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, with particular reference to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

4. Pirton Water Tower consists of a tall, braced steel structure with a steel panelled tank, characteristic of other similar 'Braithwaite' structures erected in the 1930s. It lies on an area of higher ground on the south-western edge of the village of Pirton and within the AONB. It is visually isolated from the settlement by virtue of its siting and elevation and is surrounded by open fields on 3 sides, one of which lies on the other side of Priors Hill (the Hitchin Road) and is the site of a Scheduled Monument¹. It is starkly visible in the landscape from all directions and is a prominent feature seen particularly from a broad expanse of open countryside to the west within the AONB. It is also conspicuous seen from countryside to the north across a shallow valley.
5. The site lies outside the development boundary of the village in an area designated in LP policy CGB1 as the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt. The proposed scheme consists of a substantial 4 bed 2 storey dwelling with rooms in the roof together

¹ Anglo-Saxon settlement and probable prehistoric ring ditches

with a detached garage. It would not fall within any of the typologies set out in CGB1 that indicate development would be acceptable on this site.

6. Turning to character and appearance, whilst the proposed scheme would be lower than the water tower and could be surrounded by a vegetation screen, it would nevertheless be a prominent new built feature on the edge of the village. There is little in the Planning Statement to indicate how the scheme has been designed to be sensitive to its location. The proposed design of the dwelling, although said to be in accordance with advice in the Chilterns Building Design Guide referenced in LP policy NE3, reflects the unremarkable character of much contemporary suburban built development rather than the special quality of the landscape that the policy seeks to conserve and enhance. The scheme represents insensitive development at the edge of the settlement which would interfere with and obstruct appreciation of views from Priors Hill towards the AONB. Moreover, whilst the tower is man-made and its removal would benefit the natural beauty of the AONB, the harm caused is insignificant compared with that which would result from the appeal scheme.
7. In considering this matter I have had regard to two of the ten characteristics of a well-designed place set out in the National Design Guide. It has not been demonstrated how the scheme would enhance the surroundings or be attractive and distinctive.
8. Although bulky at high level, the utilitarian water tower has a slender permeable structure which allows views through. It is not a structure which is particularly unusual in the countryside, as noted by Historic England when considering statutory listing. Its functional appearance is quite different to that of a dwelling.
9. The house would appear incongruous seen from popular public rights of way within the AONB on higher ground to the south west including the Icknield Way Trail and the Chiltern Way. It would appear quite out of keeping seen from a wide radius within this part of the AONB, including locally important views identified in the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan.
10. The adoption of the LP means that the District can now demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing land and the provision of a single dwelling on a 'brownfield' site carries only limited weight. There are no other material considerations that weigh in favour. A recently built housing scheme at Saxon Rise is not directly opposite the appeal site and lies within the village development boundary defined in the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2031, made in April 2018. It is not seen in the immediate context of the appeal site and does not provide a precedent.

Conclusion

11. The National Planning Policy Framework advises at paragraph 176 that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and AONBs, which have the highest status of protection. The appeal proposal would not conserve or enhance the special character of the AONB and would conflict with LP policies NE3 and CGB1, policies of the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan and the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024.
12. For all the above reasons, the appeal must be dismissed.

Paul Jackson

INSPECTOR