



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 May 2023

by Paul Martinson BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 June 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/C4235/W/22/3313484

Land adjacent to Holm Lea, Bridle Road, Woodford SK7 1QN

- 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 Abode Property Development Ltd against the decision of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref DC/084618, dated 11 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 6 December 2022.
 - The development proposed is Erection of two detached dwellings with associated access and landscaping.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Applications for costs

2. A costs application has been received from Adobe Property Development Ltd against Stockport Borough Council. That is the subject of a separate decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. A request for an accompanied site visit was made in order for a third party to be at hand to provide detailed local knowledge. However, I was able to carry out the site visit unaccompanied, with the benefit of all of the written evidence, and I saw all that I needed to in order to reach a determination.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies;
 - the effect upon the openness of the Green Belt; and
 - whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether Inappropriate Development

5. The Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It goes on to state

that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The Framework further establishes that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions as set out in paragraph 149. These exceptions include at: 149. e) limited infilling in villages.

6. The Council refers to Saved Policy GBA1.5 of the Stockport Unitary Development Plan Review (2006), however, amongst other things, this does not refer to limited infilling in villages. In this respect Saved Policy GBA1.5 is more restrictive than the Framework, and consequently I have given it limited weight in my assessment.
7. Limited infilling is not defined in the Framework. However, I am directed to Policy DEV1 of Woodford Neighbourhood Plan (2019) (the NP) which is broadly consistent with the Framework in terms of permitting infilling in villages. This defines infill as: *'the completion of an otherwise continuous and largely uninterrupted built frontage of several dwellings visible within the street scene where the scale of development is compatible in character to that of adjoining properties. Limited infilling should be built along similar building lines as adjoining properties.'* These are nonetheless logical parameters to have regard to in terms of defining infilling.
8. Located outside of any settlement boundary, the appeal site is an area of open agricultural land located to the north side of Bridle Road. The site lies adjacent to a bend in the road, beyond which there is a consistent pattern of relatively tight-knit ribbon development. The newly constructed 67 and 69 Bridle Road, recently allowed at appeal¹, form the end of this tight-knit row of dwellings along Bridle Road. The ribbon development then continues over the relatively narrow road, along Dobson Lane. In that regard I have noted that the previous Inspector concluded that these dwellings would *'complete the line of built development in a similar manner to that on the opposite side of the road at 66 Bridle Road'* and *'would have 'little impact on the more open character of the southern stretch of the lane'*.
9. The village itself has a rather sprawling building pattern, characterised by quite dense lines of dwellings along each of the roads as is the case with the aforementioned row of development along Bridle Road. My impressions of rounding the bend along Bridle Road towards the appeal site was of a much more open, semi-rural character, with a much looser development pattern, defined to the west on the north side of the road by the single-depth Bridle Road ribbon development. I saw that plots were much larger here with irregular gaps between buildings, rather than a consistent tightly arranged pattern as present around the corner and extending along Dobson Lane.
10. The looser development pattern and larger plots are evident to both sides of the road, although development along the north side of the road is more sporadic. The replacement dwelling² at Holmlea, set between two areas of open space, one of these being the appeal site, reinforces this pattern and is one of only two properties along this relatively long stretch of road from the bend.

¹ Ref APP/C4235/W/19/3239419.

² Ref DC/081489.

11. As such, having regard to this distinct change in character and pattern of development upon rounding the bend, in contrast with the clear ribbon development preceding it, I am not convinced that the dwellings proposed would represent the completion of an otherwise continuous and largely uninterrupted built frontage. Moreover, extending development around the corner beyond the clearly defined pattern of ribbon development would, to my mind, represent encroachment into the countryside and urban sprawl, contrary to the fundamental purposes of including land in the Green Belt.
12. Policy DEV1 refers to the development of a relatively small gap between existing dwellings. However, in order to fill the gap, the proposed dwellings and plot size would be noticeably larger and set further apart from one another than those along Bridle Road. It is also proposed to retain a gap between the development and Holmlea to allow for a field access and the adjacent public right of way. The proposal would therefore not be reflective of the tightly arranged ribbon development along Bridle Road. This leads me to conclude that the appeal site is not a relatively small gap between dwellings.
13. I have been directed to a dismissed appeal decision³ at Church Lane that, although not adjacent to the appeal site, is also in Woodford. Here, the Inspector determined that the appeal site did not constitute limited infill for the purposes of Green Belt policy, despite the presence of ribbon development to the opposite side of the road. Whilst in this case the ribbon development is located around a tight bend, there are nonetheless similarities with the appeal scheme. The Inspector set out that: *'There are very few buildings at all on the north side, and those which there are, are dispersed in a way which is not characteristic of the built-up parts of Woodford'*. I have concluded similarly with regard to the appeal scheme and the Inspector's decision reinforces those conclusions.
14. As such, having regard to my above assessment, I conclude that the appeal proposal does not constitute 'limited infilling in villages'. It would therefore not meet the exception listed at paragraph 149. e) of the Framework. The proposal is therefore inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would also result in encroachment into the countryside and would represent urban sprawl, contrary to the purposes of including land in the Green Belt as set out at paragraph 138 of the Framework.

Openness

15. Paragraph 137 of the Framework states that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
16. The appeal site has an open character and is predominantly open to the road. Due to the limited boundary definition, there are clear views across the site from the road to the open fields beyond. Through its openness and countryside views, the appeal site contributes significantly to the aforementioned semi-rural character along this part of Bridle Road.
17. The construction of the proposed dwellings along with associated boundary treatments, hardsurfacing, outbuildings and gardens would significantly increase the built form on the appeal site, urbanising this setting. This would result in a significant loss of openness in views from Bridle Road.

³ Ref APP/C4235/W/21/3268543

18. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposal would result in significant harm to the openness of the Green Belt, contrary to the provisions of the Framework in this regard.

Other Matters

19. The Council has confirmed that a payment of £9010.00 with a monitoring fee of £500 is required to overcome its second reason for refusal, in accordance with the Council's Recreational Open Space Provision and Commuted Sum Payments Supplementary Planning Document. A section 106 agreement (s.106) signed by both parties and dated 18 April 2023 has been provided. However, this makes reference to an Open Space Commuted Sum of £9910 and a monitoring fee of £500.00. The s.106 therefore provides an extra £900 above that which is sought by the Council.
20. The Council has confirmed that this is an error and has suggested several means of addressing it, including through a deed of variation. Nevertheless, as I am dismissing the appeal, I need not consider this matter in any more detail.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

21. The main parties agree that the Council cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites. In its Committee Report the Council sets out that it can only demonstrate a 3.2 years supply. This represents a substantial shortfall.
22. The proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would harm openness. The Framework establishes that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other considerations.
23. I acknowledge that in an incremental numerical way the scheme would contribute towards rectifying the Council shortfall in housing supply. I also accept that there would be economic benefits from the construction and occupation of two dwellings. However, these benefits are comparatively minor in respect of just two dwellings and as such carry limited weight.
24. Given the substantial weight to be given to Green Belt harm combined with the other identified harm, relative to the limited benefits of the proposed scheme in that context, the harm that would arise would not be clearly outweighed by the other considerations. Therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist.
25. Notwithstanding the minor benefits arising from the two dwellings considered above, the application of policies in the Framework provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed, as set out in Paragraph 11. d). Consequently, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is not engaged.
26. For the reasons set out above, I dismiss the appeal.

Paul Martinson

INSPECTOR