



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 August 2023

by S Rawle BA (Hons) Dip TP Solicitor

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 September 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/W/23/3318280

Land adjacent to The Sun Inn, Hill Bottom, Whitchurch Hill, Reading RG8 7PU.

- 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 W H Brakspear and Sons Ltd against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref P22/S1087/FUL, dated 17 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 18 November 2022.
 - The development proposed is the erection of detached 4 bed dwelling with detached garage and new access drive.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area having particular regard to the location of the site within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

3. There has been a previous appeal decision for this property¹. The Inspector identified that the Sun Inn forms part of an area of low-density housing to the north of Hill Bottom where the pattern of development on that side of the road is irregular and loose knit. He found that this, together with a strong verdant character, contributes to an attractive rural atmosphere which forms an important transition between the denser built-up part of the settlement and open countryside to the north. Following my site visit I agree with this assessment of the area's character and appearance.
4. The previous appeal was determined some time ago and although there has been an additional house constructed adjacent to Rose Cottage (Wallace Cottage), and some householder extensions, these are still some considerable distance away from the Sun Inn which still stands apart from other buildings and is flanked by undeveloped land on either side. Consequently, as for the previous appeal proposal, the introduction of the proposed development would have the effect of consolidating the built form at this edge of village location, to the detriment of the existing loose knit character. It follows that the proposal would detract from the landscape beauty of this part of the Chilterns AONB.

¹ APP/Q3115/A/14/2221403

5. Like for the previous appeal, the appellant once again argues that the proposal would meet the definition of infill development. Notwithstanding that there is a new local plan in place, the definition is very similar to that considered by the previous Inspector, being the filling of a small gap in an otherwise continuous built-up frontage or on other sites within settlements where the site is closely surrounded by buildings.
6. The relationship of the proposed new dwelling could reasonably be described as close to the Sun Inn. However, notwithstanding the introduction of Wallace Cottage on the same side of the road, the nearest dwellings to the north-west are some distance away and the gap cannot be considered small. Moreover, the appeal site is not closely surrounded by buildings. Consequently, the proposal would not amount to infill development within the meaning of Policy H16 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2035 adopted December 2020 (SOLP).
7. Even if I had taken the opposite view, it would not alter my conclusion that the proposal would represent an unacceptable consolidation of the loose-knit pattern of development in this part of the village. Similarly, the fact that the appeal site previously formed the pub garden of the Sun Inn doesn't justify development that is harmful to the character and appearance of the area, especially as any remains of structures associated with the pub garden have now blended into the landscape.
8. I have taken account of other developments that have been granted permission, including at appeal that have been brought to my attention. However, these involve different sites for different schemes and consequently the circumstances and the impact on their surroundings are materially different from the proposal before me. Further, the question of whether those proposals met the definition of infill development would necessarily be based on an assessment based on the individual circumstances of each site and each proposal. The fact that a different conclusion has been reached on those other sites does not change my view in relation to the appeal site. In any event, the existence of these other examples does not justify harmful development at the appeal site.
9. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would be unacceptably harmful to the character and appearance of the area and would detract from the landscape beauty of this part of the Chilterns AONB. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policies DES2, ENV1 and H16 of the SOLP which seek to ensure that development responds positively to the site and its surroundings, conserves and where possible enhances the character and natural beauty of the AONB and should be limited to infill and the redevelopment of previously developed land. It would also conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework which promotes development that is sympathetic to local character.

Other Matters

10. In several respects, such as in terms of biodiversity, landscaping, tree and hedge protection, drainage, materials, and noise protection the proposal would be acceptable or could be dealt with by conditions. However, these matters do not weigh in favour of the proposal.
11. The proposal would result in an additional dwelling within a village on land that was previously used as a beer garden where there is no other currently

identified use. However, this matter and any other benefits associated with the proposal such as associated financial contributions that would help support and improve local infrastructure, temporary employment opportunities during construction, retention of local facilities due to the addition of a new household, payment of the Community Infrastructure Levy and habitat enhancements are clearly outweighed by the adverse impact the proposal would have on the character and appearance of the area.

Conclusion

12. For the reasons given above the proposal would be unacceptably harmful to the character and appearance of the area and would detract from the landscape beauty of this part of the Chilterns AONB. Overall, I conclude that the proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no material considerations which indicate that the decision should be made otherwise in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal is dismissed.

S Rawle

INSPECTOR