
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 April 2024

by S D Castle BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 MAY 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/W/23/3329033

Barnaby House, Roundbridge Park, Old Woking Road, Woking GU22 8JH

- 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 Mr S Dormer against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PLAN/2022/1149, dated 15 December 2022, was refused by notice dated 6 July 2023.
 - The development proposed is erection of a garden storage building and car port.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and its effect on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it;
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area;
 - the effect of the development on biodiversity and nature conservation; and
 - if the proposal would be inappropriate development, would the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, be clearly outweighed by other considerations. If so, would this amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Green Belt

3. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The Framework outlines that the construction of new buildings, other than in connection with a limited number of specific exceptions, should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt (paragraph 154). One of the exceptions cited is the extension of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

4. The proposed buildings would be free standing from the dwelling and would appear as separately designed structures. The buildings would not be visually perceived as extensions to the dwelling. However, even if they were considered as extensions, their combined scale would be significant in comparison to the existing dwelling. The Council advises that the buildings would represent an approximately 64% increase in the footprint of the dwelling. This figure has not been disputed by the appellant and represents a substantial proportional increase. Whilst the proportional volume increase would be lower, the Framework does not provide any guidance as to what may be regarded as proportionate or disproportionate. I find that the cumulative scale of the buildings, combined with the substantially increased spread of built form across the site, would result in the buildings being disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
5. I therefore find that the proposed buildings do not meet any of the exceptions set out in the Framework and they are, by definition, inappropriate in the Green Belt.
6. Paragraph 142 of the Framework states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It identifies openness as an essential characteristic of the Green Belt. The construction of buildings where there were not previously buildings necessarily reduces the openness of the Green Belt. Consequently, there would be a detrimental spatial effect on openness as a result of the bulk of the buildings. There would also be a visual impact of the proposal on openness due to the increased spread of the buildings being perceived in public and private views. The car port would be glimpsed from the public right of way to the west of the site, and occupiers of the adjoining dwellings would view the buildings in private views. Whilst the reduction in openness would be limited and localised, it would nonetheless result in harm to the Green Belt.

Character and Appearance

7. Barnaby House is a large 2-storey dwelling recently built as part of the residential redevelopment of Roundbridge Farm. The site is located on the eastern edge of this small development which is arranged around a small yard. The site is predominantly surrounded by open countryside and a public right of way runs north to south past the western edge of the development.
8. The Roundbridge Farm development approved plans¹ depict houses arranged in a farmyard layout, with architecture reflective of traditional farm buildings. The approved layout and landscaping plans show the spread of built form consolidated within the bulk of the dwellings and well contained within predominantly planted garden boundaries.
9. The storage building would appear out of kilter with the farmyard style layout by virtue of its positioning disrupting the traditional courtyard style layout. The harmful visual effect of the storage building would be further exacerbated by its significant scale and its domestic, rather than utilitarian, architectural features. The building would project beyond the application site boundary of the original Roundbridge Farm redevelopment planning permission, representing a harmful urbanising encroachment into the attractive and undeveloped surrounding countryside.

¹ PLAN/2013/0137

10. Whilst the proposed car port would be of a more modest scale, it would reduce the undeveloped space between dwellings and would be glimpsed from the public right of way to the west. It would, therefore, result in the further urbanisation of the site, adversely affecting the rural character and appearance of the surrounding area.
11. The buildings would, therefore, cumulatively harmfully urbanise the rural character and appearance of the site, disrupting the original farmyard character of the Roundbridge Farm redevelopment, hindering its comfortable transition with the surrounding open countryside. This harm to the character and appearance of the area would be contrary to Policies CS21 and CS24 of the Woking Core Strategy (2012) (WCS). Taken together these policies require, amongst other things, that developments respect and make a positive contribution to the character of the area in which they are situated. For similar reasons the development would conflict with the Framework, including paragraphs 135 and 180.

Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

12. The development involves built form within and adjacent to the Roundbridge Farm Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI). Policy CS7 of the WCS states that within locally designated sites, development will not be permitted unless it is necessary for appropriate on-site management measures and can demonstrate no adverse impacts to the integrity of the nature conservation interest. The policy goes on to state that development adjacent to locally designated sites will not be permitted where it has an adverse impact on the integrity of the nature conservation interest that cannot be mitigated.
13. The proposals are not supported by any ecological assessment of the impacts of the development and the development is not necessary for appropriate on-site management measures of the SNCI. Whilst the appellant refers to a previous ecological assessment relevant to the site, no such assessment is before me. Even if an historic ecological assessment was before me, it wouldn't have considered the effects of the current appeal development.
14. As such, insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that the proposals would not result in adverse impacts on the integrity of the SNCI, or that the development is necessary for appropriate on-site management. The development is therefore contrary to WCS Policy CS7 and the provisions of the Framework with regards to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity.

Green Belt Balance

15. The Framework makes it clear that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. It establishes that 'very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
16. Condition 16 of the permission² granting the residential redevelopment of the Roundbridge Farm site prevents the construction of outbuildings and hardstanding on the site under the provisions of the General Permitted Development Order 2015 (as amended). Formal discharge of Condition 8 of the permission approved a hard and soft landscaping scheme, including details of

² Ref: PLAN/2013/0137

boundary treatments and any means of enclosure. As such, there is no realistic fallback position with regards to the provision of outbuildings on the site and I afford this consideration very limited weight.

17. Provision of the garden store would allow for the storage of garden equipment and domestic paraphernalia that may otherwise be spread across the site. The existing house, however, already includes a garage that has the capacity to provide storage for some such items. As such, I give this consideration limited weight in favour of the proposal.
18. The development would be inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful. There would be harm to the openness of the Green Belt and conflict with one of the purposes of including land within the Green Belt given the proposals fail to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. These matters attract substantial weight against the development. Having considered all matters in support of the development, they collectively would not clearly outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.
19. As such, the proposal would conflict with WCS Policy CS6 and Policy DM13 of the Woking Development Management Policies DPD (2016) and the Framework. Taken together these policies seek, amongst other things, to protect the essential characteristics of the Green Belt.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

20. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications for planning permission to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations, including the Framework, indicate otherwise. Substantial weight is given to the identified conflicts with the development plan, and the Framework, relating to Green Belt harm. Moderate weight is given to the identified harm to character and appearance, and to the conflict with policies relating to ecology and nature conservation. The limited weight given to other considerations in favour of the proposal noted above would not outweigh the identified harms.
21. The proposal would, therefore, conflict with the development plan, when read as a whole, and there are no other considerations, including the Framework, that outweigh this identified conflict.
22. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

S D Castle

INSPECTOR