
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 June 2024

by David Reed BSc DipTP DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 13 August 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/W/24/3340197

Land at the end of Coffin Way, Blewbury OX11 9QD

- 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 Neil Grant against the decision of Vale of White Horse District Council.
 - The application Ref P23/V2635/FUL, dated 23 November 2023, was refused by notice dated 18 January 2024.
 - The development proposed is the construction of a single dwelling and associated external works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including the effect on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NL).

Reasons

3. The proposal is for a contemporary design dwelling on a parcel of paddock land on the edge of the village behind the long rear gardens of Nos 4-5 Westbrook Green. The site lies next to Coffin Way, a private road leading from Westbrook Street which would provide access. To the west lies open countryside, to the north a further paddock and school grounds, whilst to the south, on the other side of Coffin Way and a public footpath, lie two large detached dwellings built following the demolition of buildings at Westbrook Farm¹. A previous application for a dwelling on the site was refused in 2017².
4. Blewbury is defined as a 'larger village' by Core Policy 3 (CP3) of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1 2016 (the LPP1) where CP4 allows development within the built-up area. Neither the LPP1 nor the follow up Detailed Policies and Additional Sites Plan 2019 define the built-up area, but Policy P1 of the Blewbury Neighbourhood Plan 2016 (the NP) states that it is 'defined by the boundaries of permanent, non-agricultural buildings located around the edge of the village'. The built-up area does not therefore include 'large gardens, paddocks and other undeveloped land in the curtilage of buildings on the edge

¹ Part of a four-dwelling scheme P21/V3417/FUL

² P17/V0512/FUL

of the settlement, where they provide a transition between the surrounding countryside and the built-up areas of the settlement’.

5. The appellant argues that the inclusion of the site within Village Character Area 2 in the NP means that it lies within the built-up area of the village, and draws attention to several comments in the discussion which might support that conclusion. However, the purpose of the detailed character area assessment is to describe the main features and characteristics of the village to inform and guide future development, not to define the built-up area boundary which is the specific function of Policy P1. If there is any inconsistency within the NP, this is unintentional and the definition in Policy P1 prevails³.
6. The site is wide open to the agricultural field to the west, and on the approach to the village along the public footpath, the housing on Westbrook Green and the primary school are well screened by trees within the rear gardens and the mature trees that surround the primary school playing field. A new dwelling, however well designed, would be unduly prominent and intrusive in this view, and any boundary screening would take many years to become fully effective. The starkly modern proposal with extensive two storey glazing on the west elevation and just 1.2 m high post and rail fencing along the edge of the field is clearly intended to take advantage of the rural view. However, this would result in a concomitant significant visual impact on the countryside to the north west of the village, part of the designated NL.
7. The appellant argues that the character of the area has substantially changed since 2017 due to the development that has taken place south of Coffin Way. This has included the redevelopment of the Westbrook farm buildings with four dwellings, a new detached dwelling west of Garden House⁴ and the adjacent Lavender House which replaced a former commercial building. These new houses have changed the nature of this section of the village, but the area was previously occupied by several farm buildings with a physical presence, not open ground as in the present case.
8. In addition to this different background, the Coffin Way private drive and footpath form a clear boundary between the redevelopment to the south and the area to the north with its open land, primary school playing field and well-established rear gardens. The edge of the village to the south now comprises a line of four dwellings and gardens along the field boundary, whilst that to the north is softer, a well treed, less developed transition from built up village to its rural setting. A single dwelling here, particularly a strident modern design with intentionally little screening⁵, would conflict with the objective of NP Policy P1 to protect undeveloped land on the edge of the village that provides a transition between the surrounding countryside and the built-up area.
9. For these reasons the proposal would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area, including the landscape character of this part of the North Wessex Downs NL. The proposal would conflict with LPP1 Policies CP4, CP37 and CP44 which resist development outside the existing built area of larger villages, require proposals to respond positively to the site and its surroundings, seek to protect the district’s landscape and seek to conserve the

³ The village character area discussion confuses the terms built-up area and village boundary, but importantly, nowhere is it said that the built-up area and the village character areas are coterminous.

⁴ A flat roof, contemporary modern design but east of Plots 3 and 4 of the Westbrook Farm development.

⁵ Albeit slightly to the east and with a lower overall height than plot 4 of the Westbrook Farm development.

natural beauty of the NL. The proposal would also conflict with NP Policies P1, P2 and P6 which define the built-up area of Blewbury, seek to preserve the character and appearance of the village, protect views within the NL and seek to reinforce the locally distinctive character of the area concerned.

Conclusion

10. The proposal would provide a single three-bedroom dwelling which would make a useful contribution to local housing needs and have economic and social benefits for the area. However, these benefits are outweighed by the harm that would result to the character and appearance of the area including the North Wessex Downs NL and the associated conflict with the development plan.
11. Having regard to the above the appeal should be dismissed.

David Reed

INSPECTOR