



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 August 2024

by R Lawrence BSc (Hons), PGDip (TP), MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 August 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3336959

The Vale, Forest Road, Binfield, Wokingham RG40 5QY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr David Drew against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 232583.
 - The development proposed is the change of use of paddock to private equestrian space and erection of stable building.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposed stable building would be sited on an existing area of hardstanding. A previously dismissed appeal¹ on the site upheld an enforcement notice requiring its removal. The hard standing is shown as existing on the submitted plans, however, it does not form part of the description of development. As such, it is not before me for consideration as part of this appeal.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the countryside.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises an area of land off Forest Road, to the rear of the dwellings known as Cherry Trees and The Vale. It is accessed via a private driveway which also serves the Vale. Forest Road is free from street lighting and is set within an area of countryside which is rural in character. The site is enclosed by fencing and a hedgerow, and contains a large area of gravel, together with an area of hardstanding, with the remainder laid to grass.
5. The site lies within a landscape of rural farmland which is identified as Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019). The Council has also advised that the site sits within the buffer zone of the Billingbear Valued Landscape, a local designation. The features of these include open arable fields, a rolling agricultural landscape, sparse ribbon development and a remote quality resulting in a sense of

¹ APP/X0360/C/22/3294935 dated 24 May 2023

tranquillity. Policy TB21 of the Adopted Manging Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 (LP) requires that proposals retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

6. Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy 2010 (CS), is applicable. This relates to development in the countryside and aims to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. Proposals will not normally be permitted except in certain circumstances. These include where it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of the countryside, does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings and would be contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion.
7. The proposed stable building would contribute to a recreational activity in the countryside, albeit for private benefit. This would accord with one of the criteria of CP11. It is also noted that the principle of equestrian development in the countryside is acceptable to the Council.
8. The size of the stable building would be large. There is no policy requirement to justify the size of the stable building, however, it would considerably exceed the size recommended by the Code of Practice for the welfare of horses produced by Defra. The size of the building is such that it would be visible above the site boundaries. The proposal would therefore appear prominent by virtue of its size.
9. I note comparisons with the recently approved garage building², however, there are fundamental differences between the buildings. These include its residential use as well as its functional link and physical proximity to existing dwellings. As such, the garage approval does not provide justification for the size of the stable building in this case.
10. The location of the stable building would be a considerable distance from the residential built form associated with the Vale, including the recently constructed garage building, and would encroach into the countryside. Whilst the existing hedgerow would provide some screening, this could not be relied upon to remain in perpetuity.
11. Given the separation, and the different use, it would not be well-related to the existing residential buildings, and its location would be distant from the road and neighbouring built form. The effect would be encroachment into the countryside, which would erode the sparse ribbon pattern of development which in turn contributes to the rural character of the area.
12. My attention is also drawn to the reduced level of screening closer to the existing residential buildings, which would in turn mean a higher level of visibility if an alternative siting closer to existing built form was pursued. It is not the role of this appeal to speculate as to the acceptability of alternative proposals, however, the existing vegetation carries limited weight given the lack of certainty over its long-term retention.
13. The internal landscape consultation response to the original application raised no objection to the proposal, subject to securing minor hedgerow replacement planting. I have had regard to the potential to secure minor landscaping works by condition, however, the stable building would be visible above the

² LPA Ref 232260

hedgerow, and therefore such planting would not overcome the harm identified.

14. The proposal would preserve the character of open arable fields, and the agricultural setting. Nonetheless, the erosion of the sparse ribbon pattern of development would fail to retain or enhance features which contribute to the landscape character.
15. Given these factors, I find that the proposal would have a detrimental effect upon the character and appearance of the countryside. The proposal fails to meet the criteria set out in Policy CP11 of the CS and given the harm to the landscape character, there would be a conflict with Policy TB21 of the LP. The proposal would also conflict with CS Policies CP1 and CP3; and CC03 of the LP, these policies require, amongst other matters, that development protects landscape features, maintains the high quality of the environment, and avoids a detrimental impact upon the landscape.
16. Policy CC01 sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development. I have not been referred to any specific conflict with this policy which sets out the approach for determining applications. This has not therefore been determinative.
17. The development would also conflict with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, which include that development is sensitive to its landscape setting and should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Other Matters

18. The existing hardstanding forms part of the appellants justification for the siting of the stable building. Whilst the hardstanding is present on site, in light of the upheld enforcement notice requiring its removal and because its not before me for consideration, it could not be retained in any event. Given this position, it attracts very limited weight and does not justify the harm identified arising from the siting of the stable building.
19. The Council has raised a concern regarding the welfare of horses, in relation to the proposal, in respect of the limited grazing space that would be provided. This is a matter which is covered by other legislation, given this, and as I am dismissing the appeal on other grounds, there is no need to explore this further.
20. The appellant contends that the site has no agricultural value and that it would be difficult to lease to a local farmer. Even if I were to accept this position, this does not override the need to assess proposals, such as the appeal scheme, on their own individual merits.
21. The absence of objections from interested parties is noted, however, this does not justify the harm I have identified.

Conclusion

22. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

R Lawrence

INSPECTOR