



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 September 2024

by Hannah Guest BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 06 November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/24/3344695

Knappswood Farm, Pangbourne Road, Upper Basildon, Reading, West Berkshire RG8 8LN

- 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 John Wakefield against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/00226/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as erection of two detached double garages and formation of individual access drives to plots 1 & 2 and entrances gates.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for erection of two detached double garages and formation of individual access drives to plots 1 & 2 and entrances gates at Knappswood Farm, Pangbourne Road, Upper Basildon, Reading, West Berkshire RG8 8LN in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 24/00226/FUL, subject to the following conditions:

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with drawing no: KF.SP104 Rev A.
- 3) The external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall be constructed in the materials shown on drawing no: KF.SP104 Rev A.
- 4) Prior to the commencement of works above slab level for the garages hereby permitted a hard and soft landscaping scheme shall have been submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority. The details of the scheme shall include an implementation programme.

The landscaping scheme shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and agreed implementation programme.

If, within a period of 5 years from the date of planting any tree or plant (or any tree or plant planted in replacement of them) is removed, uprooted, destroyed or dies or becomes seriously damaged or defective, another tree or plant of a similar size and species as that originally planted shall be planted at the same place within the first planting season following the removal, uprooting, destruction or death of the original tree or plant.

Preliminary Matters

2. On 22 November 2023, all areas in England and Wales designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) were retitled National Landscapes.

There has been no change to the legal designation and policy status of these areas. For the avoidance of doubt, I have used the term AONB, which remains in the latest version of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework).

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this appeal are the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and whether it would preserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs AONB.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located within the North Wessex Downs AONB (AONB), where the Framework states that the scale and extent of development should be limited. It is set between open paddocks, which are enclosed by surrounding houses on Knappswood Close, Morrison Close, Pangbourne Road and Wakemans, as well as woodland, and tree belts. As a result, the appeal site and surrounding paddocks are well contained and, although they are visible from the surrounding houses, they are largely screened from public vantage points and views taken from the wider AONB.
5. I have before me a copy of the approved site landscape plan¹ for the permitted scheme² on the appeal site, which shows 1.8m close board fencing, post and rail fencing and hedging around the frontage of the approved dwellings. The plan includes a shared gravel driveway providing access to separate parking areas flanked by lawned areas. Bollards loosely depict the perimeter of the driveway and parking areas, and several trees would be planted within the lawned areas. I understand that no buildings were permitted to the front of the approved dwellings to allow for an open frontage.
6. I saw on my visit that the boundary fencing associated with Plot 2 has already been erected. This fencing, particularly the taller close board fence that projects forward of the approved dwelling's front elevation, is an urbanising feature, which creates some enclosure. There was also a brick retaining wall and post and rail fence running between the frontages of the approved dwellings, as well as wooden gates at the entrance of Plot 2. These are also urbanising features, which are not shown on the approved site landscape plan.
7. The proposed double garages, brick pillars and gates would be limited in their scale and extent, as would the increase in hardstanding from that approved. The garages would be a moderate size and would appear proportionate and subservient to the large, approved dwellings that they would serve. Their form and materials would also be in keeping with the approved dwellings.
8. The approved dwellings and their frontages are set back further from the access road than the existing stable block to the north. Given this, the proposed garages, brick pillars, gates and hardstanding would not be visible from Pangbourne Road and views of them taken from the access road would be very limited until passing the stable block.
9. Paragraph 6 of the West Berkshire House Extensions Supplementary Planning Guidance (2004) advises that garages should normally be located to the side and rear of dwellings and set back from the highway. While the proposal would

¹ Drawing No: NF.SP101 Rev A

² Planning application Reference: 17/03374/FULD

not fully accord with this advice, in this case, the scale and position of the proposed garages means they would not dominate the main elevation of the approved dwellings. I also saw on my visit that the positioning of garages and other outbuildings to the front of dwellings is a relatively common characteristic of the wider area, as are brick pillars and metal gates. The appeal proposal would therefore not appear out of keeping with the character and appearance of the wider area and would not result in any appreciable harm in this regard. As such, I am of the view that it would not diminish the approved scheme.

10. The proposal would therefore accord with Policy CS14 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Development Plan Document (2012) (Core Strategy), which seeks to ensure all new development demonstrates a high quality and sustainable design that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area and makes a positive contribution to the quality of life in West Berkshire.
11. The proposed garages, brick piers and gates would increase the urban appearance of the site. However, they would be positioned between the existing farm buildings and would be a relatively modest addition to the existing cluster of built development. Given this, they would have a limited impact on the rural character of the AONB, either individually or cumulatively with the approved dwellings.
12. I appreciate that the Council worked with the appellant on the previous scheme to ensure it was policy compliant and, in particular that there was a spacious and open frontage to the approved dwellings. Nonetheless, while the proposal would reduce the openness of the frontages, this would not be to a significant degree. They would maintain a spacious character and an appearance similar to the frontages of other houses in the area. Any effect on the open character of the area and wider AONB would be very limited and localised and would not amount to any appreciable harm.
13. Accordingly, for the reasons above, the proposal would conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB. I am mindful that Section 85(A1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended) places a statutory duty upon me to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. I have found the proposal would not harm the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB and thus would conserve its natural beauty. In this case, given the modest scale of the proposal, the provision of a high-quality landscaping scheme, which could be secured by condition, would be a proportionate means to discharge the duty to enhance the natural beauty³ of the AONB.
14. The proposal would therefore accord with Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy and Policy C3 of the West Berkshire Council Housing Site Allocations DPD (2006-2026) (2017) (DPD), which seek to conserve and enhance the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character of the District. It would also accord with Policy C6 of the DPD, which permits extensions and alterations to permanent dwellings provided they are subservient and have no adverse impact on local rural character.

³ Section 92 of the CROW Act defines the conservation of natural beauty as including the conservation of flora, fauna and geological features.

Conditions

15. The Council has suggested that, in the event the appeal was allowed, 4 conditions be imposed on any grant of permission. In imposing conditions, I have had regard to the approach in the Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance. I have accordingly modified the wording or form of certain conditions without altering their fundamental aims.
16. In addition to the statutory time limit condition, a condition specifying the plans that are approved and that the development shall be undertaken in accordance with them is required in the interests of certainty. For the same reason and to protect the character and appearance of the area, a condition is necessary to ensure that the external materials of the proposed garages match those of the approved dwellings, as set out on drawing No: KF.SP104 Rev A.
17. Given the implications of the revised frontage layout on the previously approved site landscape plan, a condition requiring the preparation of and accordance with a hard and soft landscaping scheme is also necessary. This is required in the interests of protecting the character and appearance of the area and conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.
18. The Council has requested that a condition is imposed to restrict the occupation of the permitted garages for purposes ancillary and/or incidental to the respective residential dwellings. However, this is not necessary, as if the garages are not being used for ancillary and/or incidental purposes, it is likely that another grant of planning permission would be required, otherwise they would be at risk of enforcement action.
19. While I note that Basildon Parish Council has requested a condition is imposed to ensure any lighting meets dark skies requirements, I have not been provided with the wording of such a condition to consider whether it would be necessary or reasonable.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons above, I find that the proposal would be in accordance with the development plan, read as a whole. It has not been demonstrated that there are any material considerations of sufficient weight to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with it. The appeal is therefore allowed, subject to the conditions set out above.

Hannah Guest

INSPECTOR