



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 February 2025

by **O Marigold BSc DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 04 March 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/24/3341615

Rapleys, Goring Lane, Grazeley Green, Reading, Berkshire RG7 1LS

- 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 Adrian Pike against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/02493/FUL.
 - The development proposed is extension to residential curtilage and the erection of a 3-bay garage. This application also seeks permission for the change of use of land from agricultural to residential.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have used the description of the proposal as set out in the Council's Decision Notice, which is more accurate and concise than that used in the application form. The appellant has used this revised description in the appeal form and so I am satisfied that no party would be prejudiced as a result.
3. Since the appeal was made, a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been published. Although I have made my determination against the updated national policy context, the relevant changes to the Framework are not fundamental to matters which are determinative to the outcome of this appeal.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposal would comply with the strategy of the Development Plan, including the effect on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The site consists of land surrounding Rapleys, a dwelling accessed from a driveway off Goring Road. It was once a farm and small house within a large plot, including outbuildings, some of large size. It has now been expanded considerably over time, to consist of a substantial dwelling. Near to the site are a small cluster of houses, a hotel and a public house, and the Burghfield Atomic Weapons Establishment. Although these have an urbanising influence, the area hereabouts is predominantly rural, with a countryside character.
6. Policy ADPP1 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (WBCS), adopted July 2012, makes clear that only appropriate limited development will be allowed in the countryside. Policy C8 of the West Berkshire Housing Site Allocation Development Plan Document (DPD), adopted May 2017, is also relevant. It only permits the

extension of residential 'curtilages' where amongst other things there would be no adverse impact on the character and distinctiveness of the rural area, or encroachment into it. Whilst such extensions may be acceptable in certain specified circumstances, these do not apply here.

7. The appeal site includes land that was part of a larger field, beyond the established residential area around the dwelling. There is no dispute that the land is categorised as being agricultural for planning purposes, although it is not actively used as such. Instead, it has been divided from the larger field by fencing. It contains a solar array and associated equipment, together with an impermeable drainage area, septic tank, a track and landscaping, all of which were granted planning permission¹ in October 2022 (the 2022 permission).
8. It follows that the area is not undeveloped and is seen against the backdrop of the low-level solar array, albeit to be screened behind a laurel hedge. The 2022 permission included consent for the erection of a barn to house solar equipment, but the barn has not been built. Nevertheless, condition 4 of the 2022 permission restricts use of the track and the barn, to be for agricultural purposes only.
9. The proposal seeks to change the use of some of the land to residential, and to erect a three-bay garage instead of the approved barn. Although the garage would house electrical plant, its use would essentially be domestic. The garage would have a lower height than the existing house and be set back from its frontage, thus appearing subservient. Compared to a previous refused proposal², the garage would be smaller in scale, and would have greater separation from other built form. It would use external materials intended to reflect an adjacent saddle stone barn and would help to screen the solar array.
10. Even so, the garage would have an appreciable size, mass and scale. As a result, it would extend built form eastwards beyond the established residential area. Moreover, the proposal would be domestic in its appearance because of its residential use, its external staircase serving a first-floor loft storage area, and the garage door openings on the long front elevation. Consequently, the proposal would result in the harmful sprawl of residential development into the rural area. When read together with other recent development, it would also result in the plot being dominated by extensive buildings across its width.
11. Mature trees and vegetation mean that the proposal would be largely screened from its surroundings, including from some local roads and footpaths. New hedging would be retained. However, the proposed garage would be visible from Goring Road, for example from the entrance serving the solar development. Furthermore, even if completely hidden, I am mindful that the Framework requires planning decisions to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
12. Erection of the unbuilt single-storey barn (the subject of the 2022 permission) represents a realistic fallback should the appeal be unsuccessful. The fallback would be further forward than the proposed garage. That said, it would be smaller in height and scale. Moreover, the fallback barn would have no openings on its most prominent side elevation, and it would have a simpler, more discrete design. It would result in less mass of residential built form across the site width and would not involve a change of use of the land. Accordingly, the fallback would not cause

¹ LPA reference 22/01435/FULMAJ and 22/02726/COND

² Dismissed appeal PINS reference APP/W0340/W/22/331315

the same degree of harm or conflict with DPD policy C8 as the proposal, and so does not justify it.

13. Planning permission³ has been granted to erect a 4-bay barn to replace the existing saddle stone barn, said to be of some age. The replacement barn would be forward of the frontage of the dwelling and would not be erected if the appeal scheme were allowed. However, no mechanism to secure this, such as a Unilateral Undertaking, is before me. A demolished 2-bay garage would also not be re-built. That said, these buildings would not extend built form across the width of the plot to the same extent as the proposal, or beyond the established residential area. As such, any undertaking to not erect them would not overcome the harm that would be caused by the proposal.
14. As proposed, the septic tank and the electricity mains equipment would be within the residential area associated with the dwelling. Nevertheless, no specific adverse effects have been identified from their location on land with an agricultural categorisation. As a result, these features do not justify the harm that the proposal would cause.
15. For the reasons given above, the proposal would not comply with the strategy of the Development Plan, and would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with DPD policy C8 and WBCS policy ADPP1. For similar reasons, it would also conflict with WBCS policies ADPP6, CS14 and CS19 which seek to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area, including its landscape, and the similar requirements of the Framework. DPD policy C6 relates to the extension of existing dwellings. However, as a separate outbuilding is proposed, my reading of this policy is that it does not apply to the proposal before me.

Other Matters

16. The appellant has expressed concerns about the handling of the application by the Council. This includes its communication with the appellant and whether the application should have been heard at Planning Committee, as well as the length of time that the Council took to make its decision. I note the support from local residents for the proposal. However, the processing of the application by the Council is not a matter for me, and I have focused my consideration of the proposal on its planning merits.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

17. For the reasons given, I have found conflict with the Development Plan as a whole. The material considerations in this case do not indicate a decision other than in accordance with it. This leads me to conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

O Marigold

INSPECTOR

³ LPA reference 22/01436/FUL