



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 May 2025

by R Morgan BSc (Hons) MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13 June 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/N4205/W/24/3357841

Cuboid Self Storage, Lostock Lane, Bolton, BL6 4BL

- 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 Cuboid Self Storage Ltd against the decision of Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 17731/24.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as 'temporary storage solutions, self storage containers, open storage'.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The containers are already in place. The appeal seeks permission to retain them on the site, continuing the existing storage use for a temporary period of three years.
3. The description of development on the application form, repeated in the banner heading above, refers to open storage. However, there is no mention of open storage in the appellant's submissions, and it is not included in the revised description of development which appears in the Council's decision notice, appellant's appeal form and statement. I have therefore determined the appeal on the basis that open storage is not included.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, and
 - the effect on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers, with particular regard to outlook.

Reasons

5. The appeal site forms part of a wider area which is allocated for mixed use development under Policy P6AP of the Allocations Local Plan 2014. This policy requires that development in mixed use areas should achieve a balanced mix of employment and housing over the whole area, and should follow a number of principles.

6. Notwithstanding the policy position, the wider allocated area has now been largely redeveloped for housing. The appeal site and adjacent former office building is an exception, as it is yet to undergo a scheme of regeneration.
7. The temporary storage use taking place at the appeal site is consistent with the site's allocation for a mix of uses, which includes employment development. This is the case regardless of the previous use of the site as an office car park, and the lack of any previous permission for built structures here. The principle of the storage use may therefore be acceptable here, but this is subject to meeting the other requirements of Policy P6AP, including the need for neighbouring uses to be compatible.

Character and appearance

8. The appeal site is accessed from Lostock Lane and formed of hardstanding. It is bounded on two sides by recently built housing, with further residential development close by, on the other side of Academy Way. The former car park wraps around two sides of the associated office building, which is no longer in use, and has boarded up windows and an air of dereliction and decline.
9. The dark blue coloured storage vessels which have been placed on the appeal site resemble shipping containers in size and appearance. They are around 42 in number, and of uniform appearance. The containers have been arranged in two long rows along the outer edges of the site, immediately adjacent to the rear boundaries of houses on Hercules Road and Rockwell Road. A further group of three containers is positioned on the northern boundary of the site, beyond which is Academy Way, at a lower level than the appeal site.
10. The extent to which the containers can be seen from the public domain is limited. From the entrance to the site on Lostock Lane, some of the containers are visible, but they are a reasonable distance away, and not prominent in the streetscene. From Academy Way, the northern group of three containers can be seen at the top of the embankment, but surrounding trees and vegetation provide a reasonable amount of screening.
11. Whilst the containers are not particularly noticeable in the streetscene, they are clearly visible from surrounding houses, in particular the gardens and rear facing windows of the homes on Hercules Road and Rockwell Road which back directly onto the site.
12. This is a former industrial area which is still undergoing change and transition. Without the containers, the appeal site is commercial in character, and there are other non-residential uses very close by, including a large employment area on the other side of Lostock Lane. Commercial buildings and structures are not unexpected in this area. That said, the presence of the containers has changed the character of the appeal site significantly. Prior to their installation, the area of hardstanding would have been unobtrusive, in places softened at the edges with vegetation. In contrast, it is now occupied by a large number of metal containers which appear highly prominent from, and out of character with, the surrounding houses.
13. The prominence of the containers is exacerbated by their bright blue colour, which does not reflect the more muted tones of the surrounding built environment. Their positioning in long rows means that from the upper windows of the surrounding

houses, the containers will be seen as large, solid blocks of colour, completely at odds with the existing character of the site and wider area. A change in colour could reduce their impact, but even if they were repainted, the scale and industrial appearance of the containers would detract from the appearance of the site, and from surrounding occupiers' appreciation of their surroundings.

14. When purchasing their new houses, residents will have been fully aware that there was a vacant site at the rear of their properties. Whilst there may be a general expectation that this will be redeveloped for residential use, there is an existing lawful office use, and a local plan policy which is supportive of employment uses. An alternative employment use might be acceptable on the site, but the appearance of any alternative proposal would need to be considered in the context of the immediately surrounding area. This would include consideration of the visual effects of any new development.
15. The office use could be brought back into use, with the appeal site once again used as a car park. However parked vehicles on the site would have a very different appearance to the continuous rows of solid containers which are now a highly dominant feature of the site. The possibility of another employment use on the site does not justify the retention of the containers here, and the associated harm to the character and appearance of the area.
16. The appellant has suggested that their use of the site for a suitable employment purpose is prejudiced by the lack of appropriate boundary treatment at the rear of the houses. However, the need for, and form of, any landscaping or other boundary treatment would depend on the nature of any proposed future use of the appeal site. Ordinarily, this would be addressed through any planning application for development at the site. As the containers were put in place without permission, this opportunity was not available.
17. I conclude that the form, appearance and siting of the containers detracts from the character of the immediately surrounding area. The harm is limited in extent, being experienced primarily by the occupiers of the surrounding houses, and the effect would be temporary and reversible. Even so, the containers do not respect or acknowledge the character and identity of the locality, or conserve or enhance the existing physical environment. Consequently, there is a minor conflict with paragraphs 9. and 10. of Policy OA1 of Bolton's Core Strategy 2011, which is concerned with new development in Horwich and Blackrod. For similar reasons, the proposal does not fully comply with the requirements for sustainable places contained in Policy JP-P1 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan 2024.

Living conditions

18. The containers have been sited very close to the rear boundary fences of a considerable number of houses on Hercules Road and Rockwell Road. The houses have only recently been constructed and I saw no evidence of trees or vegetation in the modest sized gardens. With no or little existing screening, the containers, which are some 2.3m high, will be clearly visible above the 2m fences. I noticed when visiting the site that one of the neighbouring occupiers had erected additional trellis type screening above their fence, presumably in an attempt to mask the containers.

19. Whilst 0.3m is not a particularly large amount, the additional height of the containers, over and above the fences, will result in an increased sense of enclosure within the small gardens. The scale and proximity of the solid metal containers, with their large areas of uninterrupted roofs, will appear intrusive, quite possibly oppressive, when viewed from the rear gardens and windows of the houses that face onto them.
20. The siting of the containers, so close to the adjacent properties, is unneighbourly. Because of their scale and form, the containers detract from the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers, and diminish their ability to enjoy their outdoor spaces.
21. Furthermore, whilst concerns about risks associated with the contents of the containers may be unwarranted, they nonetheless seem real from reading the comments sent in response to consultation. The visual effects of the containers, combined with concerns about what they may contain, may well be causing anxiety for some of the neighbours, with the potential for negative effects on their wellbeing.
22. The addition of landscaping and the repositioning of containers might help to reduce the harm, but any such changes to the scheme could be significant, and would need to be subject to consultation. It would not be appropriate to deal with this matter through a condition, as has been suggested by the appellant.
23. The ongoing storage use will result in comings and goings to the site, but it was previously a car park associated with an employment use, and has a lawful use as such which could be reinstated. Similarly, there will inevitably be some movement associated with any alternative future use of the site.
24. Local residents have noted that the site is advertised as being open 24 hours, and the nature of the use is such that customers may well wish to visit the site outside of working hours. However, the appellant is willing to accept a condition which limits opening hours to 22:00 hours. This should avoid disturbance to residents late in the evening, and I note that the Council's environmental protection officer has not objected to the scheme.
25. I am satisfied that the use is unlikely to result in unacceptable noise and disturbance, but this does not overcome the harm to living conditions described above. The scheme conflicts with Core Strategy Policy CG4, which requires that new development is compatible with surrounding land uses and occupiers, including protecting amenity. For similar reasons, the scheme fails to comply with the principles for development contained in Allocations Plan Policy P6AP.

Other Matters

26. Residents have raised concerns about security, but from a surveillance perspective there may well be advantages in keeping the site in active use, as there can be problems associated with vacant sites. The appeal site has lockable gates and is protected by CCTV cameras. Operatives visit the site on a regular basis. When visiting I noticed lots of signs reminding customers of the site to lock the gates behind them – and it is in users interests to keep the site secure. I therefore give little weight to the security concerns raised.

27. I note residents' comments about rubbish at the site, but I saw no evidence of that. There may have been problems in the past, but at the time of my visit the site appeared tidy and well maintained.
28. The storage use would only be for a temporary period. Whilst I note the Council's comment that use of the car park might prevent the re-use of the office building, the prospect of the building being brought back into active use seems unlikely, given its condition and location. It is probable that the site as a whole will be redeveloped at some point in the future. In the meantime, the storage facility is making active use of an otherwise vacant site, representing an efficient use of land.
29. The facility will provide a useful facility for some local residents and businesses, and I note the appellant's comments about high demand for the containers. The use will also be providing employment, albeit the number of jobs will be small. These matters weigh in favour of the scheme, but are not sufficient to overcome the harm to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers, and the modest harm to the character and appearance of the area.
30. The scheme's eligibility for business rates does not mean that it is acceptable in planning terms.

Conclusion

31. For the reasons given above, the scheme conflicts with the development plan. Other considerations do not outweigh this harm, so the appeal is therefore dismissed.

R Morgan

INSPECTOR