
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 July 2025 by Elizabeth Davies BSc (Hons) MIEMA, CEnv

Decision by John Morrison BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 05 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/R0335/W/25/3361492

Park View Farm, Old Wokingham Road, Bracknell Forest, Wokingham RG40 3BX

- 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 Mark Belcher against the decision of Bracknell Forest Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/00435/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the erection of single storey wooden lodge for visitor accommodation in association with adjacent fishing lake.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by a representative of the Inspector whose findings are set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the principle of the proposed development with specific regard to its location.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is in the countryside in which, according to Policy LP2 of the Bracknell Forest Local Plan 2020-2031 (2024) (LP), development is restricted to that which requires a countryside location, meets an essential local rural need or supports rural diversification. The inclusion of 'or' in this closed list would suggest that a given development only needs satisfy one to be acceptable. The policy takes the lead from the Council's spatial strategy and, specifically, the settlement hierarchy. It refers to development, which can be more than new housing.
5. It would appear the intention of the appeal scheme is to provide the unit of accommodation for use by patrons of the existing fishing lake enterprise. Which the Council appear to be satisfied is lawful. I have no reason to disagree. Other than being in connection with the existing practice, which is in the countryside, there is nothing sufficiently compelling to suggest that the proposed development in this case requires a countryside location. I.e. why it could not be in a settlement or why it would have to be close to the existing operation.
6. The appellant has not presented an argument to suggest the development would meet an essential local rural need. Essential is a high bar and would equate to something more than desirable. That said, LP2 suggests rural diversification might

be acceptable. In this regard, the accommodation is intended to support the existing operation which, from the letters of support submitted with the appeal, is well patronised and highly valued. It seems eminently reasonable to consider that the provision of accommodation would diversify the offer of the enterprise, supporting it in so doing. The current set up on site is distinctly non-urban and thus can only be described as rural by its nature. Rural, for the purposes of this policy, needn't necessarily be agricultural solely.

7. With this and the above in mind, I do not find conflict with Policy LP2 which, amongst other things, seeks to direct new development to those locations best able to support it in the interests of encouraging sustainable patterns thereof, subject to some exceptions. Of which the appeal scheme would be one.
8. Policy LP35 of the LP sets out forms of development that will be permitted in the countryside. The debate between the main parties centring on whether or not the appeal scheme would be for sport and/or recreation as far as this specific criteria of LP35 is relevant to the proposals. I agree that the development in and of itself would not be sport or recreation. It would be quasi tourist that's potentially ancillary to an existing and lawful sport/recreation use, but this is not what this criteria permits.
9. In any case, LP35 sets out, in reading the development plan as a whole, additional types of development that would be permitted in the countryside. This is not instead of the provisions of LP2, as another option, nor an extension. LP2 explains that some development in the countryside might be acceptable. I have referred to these above and determined that one of them lends support to the appeal scheme as rural diversification. LP35 does not consider such. Nor does it address the other two types of development LP2 suggests might be acceptable. It investigates employment development, housing, sport and recreation and nature conservation. None of which are relevant to the appeal scheme. It follows therefore that the criteria identified under these types are equally not applicable. The Council appears to be satisfied that the scheme would be acceptable under those matters addressed by "all development shall..." And I have no reason to disagree. I do not therefore find conflict with Policy LP35, the aims of which I have set out.

Conclusion

10. The proposal would comply with the development plan for the reasons I have set out above.

Elizabeth Davies

APPEAL PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

11. The appeal site is either within or part of the wider zone of influence/buffer zone for the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA). The Council advise that as the proposal is for visitor accommodation, mitigation would not be required. The SPA is a network of heathland sites which are designated for their ability to provide a habitat for the internationally important bird species of woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler.

12. The Council's mitigation strategy, in order to limit harm and manage effects on the integrity of the SPA and the reasons for its designation, identifies means and measures to do so. It sets out what types of development are covered as having the possibility of giving rise to likely significant effects on the SPA. Their supplementary planning document thereon suggests that such can occur from all types of development. It goes on to identify those which, as a collective, involve a human occupation/habitation element. Such as the erection, conversion and change of use of buildings to dwellings either in singular or multiple occupation, staff accommodation or hotel/residential institutions and care homes. The theory being that the planning permission granted for such means that there may be an uplift in the local population such that there might be a greater use of the SPA for recreational purposes. There then being more pressure thereon and a greater need to protect its integrity through either avoidance or use in a specified way.
13. As visitor accommodation, the appeal scheme would be akin to a hotel use, but it would operate as a self-contained unit of self-catering accommodation. For all intents and purpose, it would be a dwelling with its occupancy controlled by planning conditions. This would function therefore, different to a conventional hotel. I cannot find any details of what lengths of time people would occupy the unit as a single stay and whilst I have seen conditions that seek to limit the use of the unit to not being a primary residence and a log being kept of visitors, this does not strike me as sufficient to be satisfied that people will not stay for a longer period. What would be reasonable in this respect is as important as the appellant's intentions. Unilaterally imposing a maximum length of time would not therefore be reasonable.
14. In addition, one cannot be certain that occupiers of the unit would not venture further afield, potentially to the SPA. They may also bring animals which could further compound any potential effect they might have thereon. It would be unrealistic to restrict people from doing either of these things through planning conditions. There is nothing in the evidence to suggest that the running of the accommodation would rule these out.
15. With this and the above in mind, I remain to be convinced that the nature of the use of the proposal would be such that it would not have any likely significant effects on the integrity of the SPA. This might be clarified by further details/explanation but that is not before me. In any case, one needs to fully understand the likely effects before deciding whether mitigation is required. This has not been sufficiently demonstrated. Adopting a precautionary approach is the correct course of action in the face of the ambiguity before me, having regard to requirements under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. I am therefore unable to allow the appeal. It is, consequently and notwithstanding my representative's findings on the main issue, dismissed.

John Morrison

INSPECTOR