
Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 15 July 2015

Site visit made on 14 July 2015

by Richard McCoy BSc MSc DipTP MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 21 September 2015

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/W/15/3004253

Blanchards Hill Farm Stud, Sutton Park, Blanchards Hill, Sutton Green, Guildford, Surrey GU4 7QP

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Ms Madeline Weightman against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PLAN/2014/0878, dated 23 April 2014, was refused by notice dated 28 November 2014.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 2 no. loose boxes, 5 no. foaling boxes and an open hay barn.
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Procedural matters

1. This appeal is related to another nearby appeal ref APP/A3655/W/15/3004236 for which there is a separate decision.

Decision

2. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the erection of 2 no. loose boxes, 5 no. foaling boxes and an open hay barn at Blanchards Hill Farm Stud, Sutton Park, Blanchards Hill, Sutton Green, Guildford, Surrey GU4 7QP in accordance with the terms of the application Ref PLAN/2014/0878, dated 23 April 2014, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans: Site Plan received 28 July 2014, drawing no. P1406/01 and drawing no. P1406/02.

Application for costs

3. At the Hearing an application for costs was made by Ms Madeline Weightman against Woking Borough Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Main Issues

4. I consider the main issues to be whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and development plan policy; the effect of the proposal on

the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it; the effect on the setting of nearby heritage assets; whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Sutton Park Conservation Area, and whether any harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Green Belt

5. The appeal site is situated within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The Council argued that the proposal did not conform to any of the exceptions set out in NPPF paragraph 89 and should therefore be considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. However, the proposal would be adjacent to a stable block, barn and a ménage, and would comprise part of the Blanchards Hill Farm Stud. It would be used in connection with the operation of the farm stud.
6. As a building for the stabling of horses which would form part of an existing equine enterprise, I consider that the proposal would fall into the 2nd bullet of NPPF Paragraph 89 which relates to; *the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.*
7. The NPPF makes it clear that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence. The 5 purposes served by Green Belts are set out in NPPF paragraph 80. Of these, concerns were raised in respect of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and the prevention of neighbouring towns merging. I observed that the appeal site contains a large stable block arranged to a "U" plan. This proposal would add a small extension to the western range of the existing block to form 2 no. loose boxes and would create an enclosed courtyard by erecting a freestanding range to the south, comprising 5 no. foaling boxes and a hay barn. The additions would be single storey and of a similar appearance and finish to the existing stable block.
8. Taking a global assessment of the impact of the proposal on openness, I consider that while it would increase the amount of built development, it would be so closely associated with the existing stable block that it would not appear to have reduced openness. It would add a limb to an existing 3 sided courtyard in an inconspicuous, under-stated manner that would preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Moreover, the Council's claim that associated vehicles, vehicular movement and general activity would increase over and above existing levels to the point where openness would be harmfully reduced, has not been substantiated.
9. In addition, the modest scale and appearance of the proposal, in keeping with the larger stable block which exists on the site, allied to the use of the site for a purpose which one would associate with a rural area, would safeguard the countryside from encroachment. As such, any cumulative effect of the proposal would be contained within the existing courtyard development. Moreover, the development would be located a considerable distance from the

edges of the nearest towns of Guildford and Woking and would not incrementally contribute to the merging of these neighbouring settlements.

10. Accordingly, the proposal would not conflict with NPPF paragraph 89, Policy CS6 and of the adopted Woking Core Strategy and saved Policy REC8 of the Woking Borough Local Plan (1999). In which case, the proposal would not be inappropriate development for the purposes of NPPF and there is no requirement for me to consider the matter as to whether or not very special circumstances exist.

The effect on the setting of heritage assets

11. The NPPF defines the setting of a heritage asset as the surroundings in which it is experienced. The extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset; may affect the ability to appreciate that significance; or, may be neutral. Historic England guidance; *The Setting of Heritage Assets*, indicates that setting embraces all of the surroundings from which an asset can be experienced or that can be experienced from or within the asset. Setting does not have a fixed boundary and cannot be defined, in perpetuity, as a spatially bounded area or as lying within a set distance of a heritage asset.
12. The significance of an asset is defined in the NPPF as its value to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting. Significance may be harmed by a development. The designated heritage assets that would be affected in this instance are the *Site of Old Manor House, West of St Edwards R C Church*, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) and *the Church of St Edward the Confessor*, a Grade II listed building. I consider that the church and the SAM derive some of their significance from their settings.
13. However, I observed that there would be very limited inter-visibility between the proposal and the heritage assets. The proposal would be located on the opposite side of the existing stable block from the assets. In addition, the intervening ground also contains mature vegetation and a further agricultural building. Consequently, the proposal would form a very peripheral element within the settings of these heritage assets and would not exert any visual influence over them, thereby having a negligible effect on their significance.
14. Accordingly, I consider that the proposal would preserve the setting of the listed building for the purposes of Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the SAM for the purposes of NPPF paragraph 132, and would not conflict with CS Policy CS20.

Sutton Park Conservation Area

15. The proposal would be situated within the Sutton Park Conservation Area. This is characterised by the open parkland associated with Sutton Place, interspersed with groups of trees and isolated specimen trees. In my judgement, the proposal would be very closely associated with the existing stable block in terms of use, scale, appearance and finish to the extent that there would be no discernable change to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Accordingly, I consider that the proposal would preserve

the character and the appearance of the Conservation Area and would not conflict with saved Policy BE9 of the Woking Borough Local Plan (1999).

Other matters

16. Concerns were raised regarding the effect of the proposal on the intrinsic character and beauty of countryside and whether or not it would constitute sustainable development. In my judgement, the proposal would blend with and relate well, in terms of appearance and siting, to the existing development at the site. As such it would not harm the intrinsic beauty of the countryside or conflict with NPPF paragraph 17. Furthermore, as an appropriate facility for outdoor sport and recreation and as part of an existing rural equine enterprise, it would not conflict with the economic, social and environmental roles of sustainable development as set out in NPPF Paragraph 7.
17. The need for the proposal was called into question in terms of the viability of the business at the appeal site. This was done in the context of an assessment of accounts which were submitted by the appellant in relation to a separate appeal (ref APP/A3655/W/15/3004236) at this location in respect of an equestrian worker's dwelling. However, NPPF paragraph 89 sets no requirement for a test of viability in terms of the exceptions to the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt which would otherwise be regarded as inappropriate development. Rather, in the case of the specific exception relating to appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, an assessment has to be carried out to determine the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt and whether or not there would be any conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This matter is covered above in the section headed *Green Belt*.
18. I note from the officer report that the Council considers that the proposal would not be harmful to highway safety, the living conditions of nearby residents and ecological interests. From my assessment of the proposal, I have no reason to disagree.
19. Finally, I have considered the argument that the grant of planning permission would set a precedent for other developments at the appeal site and the Sutton Park Conservation Area although no specific developments to which this might apply have been put forward. Each proposal must be determined on its own individual merits and I do not consider that such a generalised fear of precedent is central to my decision.

Conditions

20. A list of conditions was produced which formed the basis of discussion at the Hearing. In addition to standard time commencement, I shall attach a condition relating to compliance with the approved plans. These are necessary and reasonable for the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory development and accord with the advice in the NPPF and the Planning Practice Guidance. However, a condition requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with materials shown on the approved plans is unnecessary as this matter is covered by the conditions mentioned above.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

Richard McCoy

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT

Mr R Brogden MRICS FAAV

Partner, Bruton Knowles

Mr P Barton MRTPI

Associate Partner, Bruton Knowles

Ms M Weightman

Appellant

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY

Mr J Hutchinson MRTPI

Planning Consultant

INTERESTED PERSONS

Mrs L Lines

Local resident

DOCUMENTS

- 1 Council's letters of notification of the Hearing
- 2 List of suggested conditions