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| COLD ASH 13/00763/FUL Pins Ref 220041 | Clover Cottage Westrop Farm The Ridge Cold Ash Mr B Clark | Demolition of existing dwelling, outbuildings and hard surfaces, erection of replacement dwelling with parking, revised curtilage and landscaping | Delegated Refusal | Dismissed 28.10.13 |
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Main issue

The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the landscape character of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons

Westrop Farm is a group of mainly traditional buildings, including a Grade II listed threshing barn, set in an isolated position in a rolling landscape of farmland and woods within the AONB. The proposal is to replace a small modern bungalow with a substantial, chalet-style house to be sited nearby. The bungalow's garden would be returned to agricultural use and a new, slightly smaller garden area would be enclosed around the new house. The Inspector noted that the *North Wessex Downs Management Plan* indicates that proposals for new large free-standing houses as replacement dwellings in open countryside are a key issue for the AONB.

The bungalow is located just off the edge of what is otherwise a relatively tight group of buildings. Although it is not an attractive structure, its utilitarian appearance is not inappropriate in a farming context. It is in an elevated position compared to the rest of the buildings, but its low height and small scale prevent it from being overly prominent in the landscape. Although there are public views from a nearby public footpath, these are largely limited by the land form, so that in many views only the chimney is seen.

The proposed new house would be a handsome, well-proportioned building in its own right and would not affect the setting of the listed barn. The Inspector's concerns relate to its scale and siting in this sensitive context. It would be set much further away from the existing buildings, within what is currently an open field. It would be radically larger than the existing bungalow, even if allowance were to be made for a previously permitted extension to the bungalow (which was not built) and for the proposed demolition of other minor outbuildings. It would to his mind clearly be disproportionate in the terms set out in Policy ENV23 of the West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006 (LP) and the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) *Replacement Dwellings and Extensions to Dwellings in the Countryside*.

The Inspector furthermore disagreed with the statement in the submitted *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* that the new ridge height would not be excessively higher than the existing bungalow. Though no definitive levels are given for the new ridge heights, it is clear from the submitted plans that they would be substantially higher than the bungalow, due to the rising ground and to the height of the structure.

As a result of these factors, the new house would appear as an out-of-scale structure, isolated from the farmyard group and intruding on this attractive pastoral landscape. A comprehensive landscaping scheme has been submitted, including tree and hedge planting both within the site and along the line of the public footpath. This planting, taken on its own, would enhance the local landscape. In time, it would also do much to mitigate the visual impact of the development, but it would not be sufficient to fully blend it into the landscape. The new house would continue to be intrusive.

The Inspector concluded that the proposal would unacceptably harm the landscape character of the AONB. It therefore conflicts with the aims of Area Development Plan Policies 1 and 6 and Policies CS14 and CS19 of the Core Strategy 2006-2026, LP Policies ENV22 and ENV23 and the SPG - to

ensure that developments including replacement dwellings are of a high quality of design that respects the character of the area and responds to local context, particularly in AONBs. These aims align with the National Planning Policy Framework's recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and its emphasis on securing high quality design.

He appreciated the investment being made by the appellant into the buildings and landscape at Westrop Farm, but this did not override his concerns about this particular proposal. There has been considerable discussion regarding the possible need for an agricultural tie on the new house, if it were to be permitted. The Inspector did not need to address that point here.

The degree of environmental harm which would result from this proposal means that it would not be sustainable development. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters raised, he concluded that the appeal should not succeed.

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