

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared to accompany an application for retrospective planning permission for the retention of a single storey outbuilding for the storage and maintenance of essential equipment and machinery for the upkeep of Warrenwood estate and grounds at Warrenwood Manor, Hornbeam Lane, Essendon.

1. PRE-AMBLE

Planning permission was initially refused by the council for the retention of this outbuilding for maintenance and storage associated with the upkeep of the 60 acre estate, on 12 September, 2016 (ref: 6/2016/0827/FULL), regarding it to be inappropriate development within the Green Belt where no very special circumstances existed to outweigh its potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness.

However, the planning officer's report offered the following positive comments,

(a) Whilst officers appreciate that the wider Warrenwood Manor site is extensive and there is a need for the storage of equipment associated with the maintenance of the land, the size of the proposed building is excessive.

(b) **Impact on neighbours.** Given the siting, scale and nature of the proposal, it is not considered that the proposal would impact unduly on the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

(c) **Design (form, size, scale, siting) and character and appearance within the street scene.** Local Plan Policies D1 (Quality of design) aims to ensure a high quality of design. This policy is expanded upon in the council's Supplementary Design Guidance (SDG) which requires the impact of a development to be assessed having regard to the bulk, scale and design of the proposal. The proposed development is a single storey, weather boarded building where its overall design and appearance reflects the rural locality and site. No objections are therefore raised with regard to the NPP Framework and policy D1 and Supplementary Design Guidance.

(d) Although not requested as part of the application or on the application form the council officers introduced into the description of their own accord that the development would involve a change of use from agricultural land to residential. The land however is already residential and no change of use would be required. Indeed, the officers report states as follows on this point,

"The application site comprises of an existing detached building the subject of this application which is set back from the lane and accessed via the main driveway to the house. The building is to the side of the dwelling."

And,

".from a site visit and knowledge of the site there are no animals kept on the land that are used for agriculture and it is not apparent that the use of the site is indeed agricultural."

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Warrenwood Manor is a large country house set within an estate of 60 acres (24 hectares) which includes formal and informal gardens and extensive areas of landscaped parkland, agriculture, grassland and forestry areas as well as a stables and an equestrian area with manege and associated equine facilities.

It is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

The estate extends to 24 hectares made up as follows;

- 15.5 hectares of grass
- 0.75 hectares of established woodland
- 2 hectares of newly planted parkland
- 3 hectares of residential landscaped gardens and the dwellinghouse
- 2.25 hectares of equestrian use including the 18 horse stables and manege

The estate entrance is approached via Hornbeam Lane, a bridleway and road leading south off the main road Kentish Lane. The entrance to the estate is some 500 metres along Hornbeam Lane beyond a group of 3 cottages. The estate land extends to both the east and west sides of Hornbeam Lane with the stables and equestrian land and manege and extensive pasture and paddock areas sited to the east, whilst the dwellinghouse and residential gardens, established woodland and parkland lie to the west. Hornbeam Lane continues past the estate entrance as an unmade pedestrian track and bridleway through a wooded area.

The estate is rural with the two clusters of buildings being around the 18 horse stable block (east side) and the dwellinghouse and outbuildings (west side).

The storage and maintenance building the subject of this application is located adjacent the west side of the house next to the tennis courts and formal gardens.

The surrounding area is generally undulating and rolling in form with large banks of trees and hedges and is part of the Brickendon Woods landscape character area which describes the area as predominantly wooded farmland and parkland with most land uses being well screened by dense woodlands and tall hedgerows, making views within the area generally short and that the farmland consists mainly of pastoral fields, often in equine occupation.

The area characterised by rather hilly and heavily wooded landscaped contains a large number of substantial country houses with their associated lodges and outbuildings.

3. RELEVANT HISTORY

This can be summarised in relation to the main elements for ease of reference as follows,

Equestrian use

Equestrian use was originally granted consent by the council in 1999 for change of use of land on the east side of Hornbeam Lane to equestrian use with associated manege, rides and landscaping. There were further renewals of this consent granted by the council due to delays in implementation.

Stables

The stables building was originally granted consent in 2001 on the equestrian land east of Hornbeam Lane by an appeal decision for a 20 box stable building following the councils refusal. There were further consents granted by the council due to delays in implementation. The stables were shown as part of the residential curtilage of the house and conditioned to be used solely in connection with the house and not for commercial purposes.

House

A replacement dwelling on land on the west side of Hornbeam Lane was originally granted consent by an appeal decision in 1990. There were subsequent consents granted by the council to vary the design features.

The applicant purchased the estate in 2013 when most of the above facilities and buildings were half finished and had lain derelict for several years due to the previous owner running out of funds.

Also at that time there were a number of outbuildings and estate buildings scattered around the dwellinghouse. These were removed recently.

4. THE APPLICATION

The application seeks retrospective planning permission for the retention of the single-storey outbuilding for storage and maintenance purposes. The low key functional design minimises its impact in the landscape and follows the tradition of single-storey, weatherboarded vernacular barn type structures found in abundance across the district, many of which are in the Green Belt. The exterior finish is in weatherboarding with a tiled pitched roof.

A series of lockable stores and workshops set around a central open courtyard follows the tradition of ancillary and service buildings found on many country estates and the form of the building demonstrates that Green Belt considerations have influenced all aspects of the design.

The building is on the site of a previous outbuilding and stables and concrete hardstanding which belonged to the former estate house.

The building is sited in a hollow where natural ground levels are around 2 m below the level of the surrounds.

The primary function of the outbuilding is to provide the necessary workshop and storage space for machinery and equipment to maintain the 60 acre estate, house and gardens, and provide an essential base for the 3 full-time groundsmen to perform their daily duties related to the upkeep of the house and grounds.

All the machines enable the estate to be run self sufficiently and are expensive pieces of equipment and need to be stored out of the weather and in lockable compartments. The machinery includes

- 2 x tractors
- Self propelled mower

- Rotivator
- Chipper
- 2 x trailors
- Grass harrower
- Roller
- Ride on mower
- Topper
- Load lifter
- Brush cutter

In addition there is a workshop and separate lockable store for hand tools such as chainsaws, hedge trimmers, rakes, spades, ladders etc

Compartments also for the storage of spare timber, posts, tiles, hinges, bags cement, drainage pipes and other building materials.

There is also a log store.

There are 3 full time and two part time estate workers which gives an idea of the amount of work that is done on the house and grounds.

5. THE ORIGINAL REFUSAL

Application 6/2016/0827/FULL for the same proposal was refused for the following reason,

“The site is designated as Green Belt in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan and the proposed change of use of the land to residential together with the proposed buildings are inappropriate development. Furthermore, the buildings harm the openness and the purposes of including land within the Green Belt and do not retain and enhance the rural landscape and visual amenity of this part of the Green Belt. In addition, the proposed hardstanding is inappropriate development which also does not retain and enhance the rural landscape and visual amenity of this part of the Green Belt. No very special circumstances appear to exist which outweigh the potential harm of the development to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and the other harm identified. Accordingly, the proposal is contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework and policies RA10 and D2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 and the councils Supplementary Design Guidance.”

6. NATIONAL POLICY

National Planning Policy Framework NPPF (9. Protecting Green Belt land)

Planning Practice Guidance PPG (9. Protecting Green Belt land)

7. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005

RA1- Development in the Green Belt

RA3 – Extension to dwellings in the Green Belt

RA10 – Landscape Regions and Character Areas

Supplementary Design Guidance 2005

8. ASSESSMENT

The site is located within the Green Belt.

That being so there are two main issues to consider.

Firstly, whether the proposal constitutes appropriate or inappropriate development in terms of National and Local Green Belt policies.

Secondly, if the development is deemed inappropriate whether any very special circumstances exist.

Appropriate or inappropriate development

National policies contained within the NPPF and PPG seek to protect Green Belt land from inappropriate development unless outweighed by ‘*very special circumstances*’ (para 87) and when considering planning applications local planning authorities are advised to ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt (para 88).

Para 89 lists exceptions to where the construction of new buildings in the Green belt will not be regarded as inappropriate.

These include,

- The extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
- The replacement of a building, providing the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces.
- Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land) whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings) which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

Para 90 lists certain other forms of development also not inappropriate in the Green belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

These include,

- Engineering operations

The single-storey outbuilding to the house for storage and maintenance of the house, estate and gardens is sited immediately to the west of the dwellinghouse and its formal gardens which include a tennis court and childrens play equipment.

For all intents and purposes it looks like a typical outbuilding to a country house of this size set within landscaped garden and grounds. A substantial amount of landscaping has been done around and in front of the building and the accessway.

It relates well to the Manor House and the residential planning unit and is not in an isolated position. It is on the site of a former outbuilding and stables building which along with a concrete hardstanding existed next to the original dwelling and its tennis court and occupied this position until recently demolished by the applicant. Although of similar orientation but larger footprint than the original outbuildings, it is within the residential part of the estate and associated activities and not visually divorced .

The council view this as sited on residential land and I agree that it is part of the residential planning unit of the estate and not agricultural land.

The block paved roadway entrance to the house which sweeps round in front of the dwelling and duck pond has been extended in a discreet manner to run in front of the tennis courts in the same material and softened by 2 metre wide landscaped rose beds on each side to provide a service access for vehicles. This does not look out of place due to the limited width, use of similar materials and the extensive use of planting and landscaping around it.

The councils application of Green Belt policy is set out in **Policy RA1- Development in the Green Belt** which states as follows,

Within the Green Belt, as defined on the Proposals Map, except for development referred to in Policies RA2, RA3, RA4, RA5, RA6, RA7, RA8, RA9 and RA16 or in very special circumstances permission will only be given for development for the following purposes.....agriculture or forestry, small scale essential facilities for outdoor sport or recreation, re-use of buildings..."

One of these exceptions is **Policy RA3 – Extensions to Dwellings in the Green Belt** which states,

Permission for extensions to existing dwellings within the Green Belt will be allowed only where all the following criteria are met:

- (i) The proposal would not individually or when considered with existing or approved extensions to the original dwelling, result in a disproportionate increase in size of the dwelling;***
- (ii) It would not have an adverse visual impact (in terms of its prominence, size, bulk and design) on the character, appearance and pattern of development of the surrounding countryside.***

The policy confirms that, ***'This policy also applies to those outbuildings for which planning permission is required.'***

The proposal is essentially an outbuilding to the dwelling, and replaced an original outbuilding on the land and within the residential curtilage.

The approximate floor space of the outbuilding is 390 sq m which is not considered to result in a disproportionate increase to the size of the large country dwellinghouse Warrenwood Manor.

In relation to visual impact (point 2 of the policy) on the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside, the council have confirmed that in respect of its siting design, scale and bulk it is acceptable and reflects the rural locality and site.

Given that the building is on the site of a previously developed site, albeit now removed, it would come under the category of the partial redevelopment of previously developed brownfield land. The Welwyn Hatfield District Plan defines '*previously developed land*' as land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure (excluding agricultural or forestry buildings) and associated fixed surface infrastructure. This was the case here.

My view is that the building proposed meets the principles of para 89 of the NPPF for appropriate development in that it is,

- An extension to a building (which the council define as including outbuildings)
- A replacement of a building
- A partial development of a previously developed site

Should this not be accepted then I turn to the Very Special Circumstances which exist which outweigh any harm that would be caused by virtue of the inappropriate development.

Very Special Circumstances

The NPPF states (para 88) that, '*Very special circumstances* ' *will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*

The Framework does not prescribe a list of what might constitute very special circumstances. The council suggest in the planning officers report that it may be that a single aspect of a proposal may itself be a very special circumstance sufficient to justify development or it may be that a number of circumstances may cumulatively amount to very special circumstances.

Need

The council officer's report accepts the need for an outbuilding for maintenance of the estate when it states,

'Whilst officers appreciate that the wider Warrenwood Manor site is extensive and there is a need for the storage of equipment associated with the maintenance of the land, the size of the proposed building is excessive including two workshops, a tractor and trailer store, two plant and equipment stores and animal feed area, seasoned log store and log cutting and drying area.'

The council thus accept the need and principle of such an outbuilding but question its size.

A country estate of this kind and size cannot operate without such a facility.

The need cannot be met by other on site buildings.

The applicant considers that the size of the building is not disproportionate to the size of the estate or adjoining house and is essential to enable the estate to be self- sufficient in its management.

In support of the need for this size of building as an outbuilding for storage of equipment to maintain Warrenwood Manor and its estate, this application includes an appraisal by JSP Management Ltd.

The report concludes as follows,

'I have analysed the plans and seen the building in situ and can confirm that the building complex is what I would expect an estate of this size and type to have and calculating the storage space needed for all the machinery currently on site and expected in the near future, all compartments will be used by estate maintenance equipment.'

The estate employs 3 full-time groundsman and 2 part-time estate workers. They maintain all the estate including house, stables and grounds.

Warrenwood is a newly developed estate. The house, stables and equestrian land have all been developed in the past three years. The estate covers 60 acres in total with extensive landscaped gardens, newly planted parkland, established forestry area and woodland, significant areas of grassland hedgerows and fencing.

Potential harm to the Green Belt

When considering the weight to attach to any very special circumstances the Framework implies one has to consider this against what the potential harm to the Green Belt would be if permission were granted.

It should also be borne in mind that the Framework (para 81) advises councils once Green belts have been defined to *'plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Beltto retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity...'*

In this case the council have confirmed in the officers report (in a section headed *Design form, size, scale, siting and character and appearance within the street scene*) that the design complements the rural areas character when it states,

'Local Plan Policies D1 (Quality of Design) aims to ensure a high quality of design. This policy is expanded upon in the Councils Supplementary Design Guidance (SDG) which requires the impact of a development to be assessed having regard to the bulk, scale and design of the proposal. The proposed development is single-storey, weather boarded building where its overall design and appearance reflects the rural locality and site. No objections are therefore raised with regard to the Framework and policy D1 and the SDG.'

Similarly, under the heading *'Impact on neighbours'*, the officers report states,

'Given the siting, scale and nature of the proposal, it is not considered that the proposal would impact unduly on the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.'

Given that the above statements appear to accept the bulk, scale, siting and design of the building it would seem that any harm to the Green Belt through inappropriateness would be negligible.

The SDG indeed states that,

- *'New development should be located adjacent to or in proximity to existing buildings to lessen the impact on the rural character of the area.'*

This is a characteristic of the proposal which is sited adjoining the west side of the dwelling and its formal gardens including tennis court, a location where a previous outbuilding stood until recently.

The proposal would not result in an extension of the residential curtilage into the open countryside

The outbuilding is positioned on the site of a former hardstanding and outbuilding of the house believed to have been used as a workshop and stables which were demolished recently. Although smaller in footprint the buildings were also single storey and occupied a position within the residential curtilage adjacent the west side of the house and tennis courts.

The council comments on this in the officers report as follows,

'The applicant outlines that the building is on the footprint of a former timber building and concrete hardstanding. However, this former building has since been removed and consequently removal of the former building on the site does not constitute a benefit of the current scheme as it has already been removed. Therefore this former building on the site is not a material consideration in the determination of this application.'

However, such would constitute previously developed land and para 89 f the NPPF would apply. Moreover, the estate previously had several ancillary outbuildings scattered around the dwelling. It could be seen as a relevant factor that these have been amalgamated into a single building.

The council also refer to policy RA10- Landscape regions and Character Areas - to support their refusal. Policy RA10 states,

"Proposals for development in rural areas will be expected to contribute, as appropriate, to the conservation, maintenance and enhancement of the local landscape character of the area in which they are located, as defined in the Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment."

The site is located within the **'West End to Brickendon Wooded Slopes'** Character area which describes the area as comprising of steeply undulating wooded slopes with dense woodland and hedgerows, and accordingly views within the area are short with few views out. Given the purpose of the building which contributes to the long term maintenance and enhancement of the local landscape, along with the associated landscaping already carried out, and that the council are satisfied with the design, scale, siting and bulk it is not considered that there is a direct conflict with this policy.

Engineering Operations

The council state that the development includes an excessive amount of hardstanding, when the officers report states,

"No information to support the excessive amount of hardstanding has been put forward by the applicant, and it is considered that the extent proposed is excessive."

The reason for refusal states also that,

“In addition, the proposed hardstanding is inappropriate development which also does not retain and enhance the rural landscape and visual amenity of this part of the Green Belt.”

This is refuted. In any event, the actual statutory test of appropriateness contained in para 90 of the NPPF relates specifically to the impact on openness and any conflict with the purpose of including land within the Green Belt.

The surface is well concealed from local viewpoints. The hardstanding consists of an area centrally located between the storage buildings. It is therefore screened on three sides by the juxtaposition of the building itself and has no wider impact on the rural area or surrounds. It is flush with the ground level and has no impact on openness. Additional planting has been carried out around the building which essentially mitigates its impact. The hardstanding is not a 3D feature in any event and does not affect openness. Similarly the accessway to the building continues the style of the domestic access in front of the tennis court and is lined by 2 metre rose beds which softens any impact. Openness again is not affected and there is no conflict with the purpose of including land within the Green Belt.

Engineering operations can be appropriate development in the Green Belt under para 90 of the NPPF provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purpose of including land in the Green Belt.

My assessment in this case is that the hardstanding has no damaging impact on openness or purpose of including land within the Green Belt and is appropriate development, and that the council have not justified their statement.

9. THE PURPOSE OF INCLUDING LAND WITHIN THE GREEN BELT

The NPPF (para 80) lists the 5 purposes of Green Belts:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas
- To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Of these, only bullet point 3 needs to be considered given the councils position. Balanced against that are the following points in the applicants favour,

- There is an essential need for these storage facilities on such a large estate.
- These facilities are not unreasonable on an estate this size which wants to become self-sufficient in management and employs 3 full time estate workers thus indicating the amount of work needed.
- These storage facilities cannot be accommodated in other existing buildings on the estate.
- The council accept the need exists but query the size of the building
- The council accept the design, scale, siting and bulk comply with their Supplementary Design Guide and complement the rural character of the area
- The building is sited on the position of a former outbuilding.

- The building is sited adjacent to the house and gardens and not in an isolated position.
- The single-storey low profile means it does not dominate the adjacent house or group of buildings or become a dominant feature of the landscape.
- In true terms there is no encroachment on the countryside.
- Substantial planting works have been carried out around the building which in addition to the existing adjoining tree and hedge boundaries and location in a hollow ensures no visual intrusion.
- The surrounding area is characterised by rolling and undulating countryside, densely wooded and treed hedgerows which prohibit long term views, so that the impact of built development is negligible.
- The surrounding countryside contains a large number of country houses and estates with outbuildings next to the house which are typical of these rural surrounds and how the area has evolved.
- Any views of the building are intermittent and then seen as an extension of the adjacent dwellinghouse and not as an isolated feature in its own right
- The outbuilding is well screened to the east by the taller and larger house itself and there are no direct views from Hornbeam Lane due to the undulating land profile of the foreground to the building. To the south is a mature tree and hedge screen. Overall the outbuilding has been absorbed and settles well within the landscape rather than encroaching upon it.
- Indeed the council state that given the siting, scale and nature of the building it does not impact on neighbouring properties.

10. CONCLUSION

The single-storey outbuilding provides essential secure lockable facilities for expensive and essential machinery and equipment utilised on the estate and grounds which includes the house and equestrian land as well as areas of forestry, grassland and parkland totalling 60 acres. These are considered to constitute very special circumstances as such a facility is an essential operating need for the estate and cannot be provided from existing buildings on the land.

Sited in a hollow on land formerly occupied by residential stables/ outbuilding within the former residential curtilage of the previous house, it has been designed to satisfy the council and complements the rural areas character. It is not an isolated feature but merges into the residential complex of buildings around the house, which is a typical arrangement of most of the surrounding farms and country houses in the area who have stables, lodges and outbuildings adjoining the house. This reflects the traditional pattern of development in the area.

