
Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 8 September 2015

Site visit made on 8 September 2015

by Tim Wood BA(Hons) BTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 6 October 2015

Appeal Ref: APP/N1920/W/15/3006449

Edge Grove School, High Cross, Aldenham, Watford WD25 8NL

- 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 Edge Grove School Trust Ltd against the decision of Hertsmere Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 14/1729/FUL, dated 30 October 2014, was refused by notice dated 16 January 2015.
 - The development proposed is a new building to accommodate classrooms, hall, library and ancillary space; demolition of buildings and removal of hedge, gas tanks and fences.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. At the Hearing an application for costs was made by the appellant against the Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Preliminary Matter

3. The description of the proposed development used above was agreed as being accurate by the main parties at the Hearing.

Main Issues

4. The main issues in this appeal are;
 - Whether the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt
 - The effects of the proposal on the setting of the adjacent listed building
 - Whether there are other matters sufficient to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm.

Reasons

Whether the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt

5. The appeal relates to this school site, which contains a number of buildings, set within a large and otherwise open site. The original building is Grade II listed

and the addition of other buildings has given rise to the spread of development to the sides, mainly to the east. The site is within the Green Belt.

6. The proposal seeks to construct a 2 storey building to the west and north of the main building, and the removal/demolition of other single storey buildings. The buildings to be removed are in 2 groups, one on the site of the proposed building and the other immediately to the rear of the main building, plus a gas tank. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that new building in the Green Belt are inappropriate with the exception of, amongst others, limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites, 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.
7. The site where the building is proposed contains a small group of single storey buildings and a large number of trees. When compared to the 2 groups of buildings to be removed, the proposed building would be larger. In terms of footprint, it would be 22% larger; in floorspace, 243% larger; and in volume 348%, according to agreed figures presented to me at the Hearing. In my view, it is important not only to examine the footprint and floorspace increases, but the volumetric increase gives a good impression of the additional amount of built form; this is particularly so in this case as the buildings to be removed on the site of the new building are very low and unobtrusive. When considered in these terms, I consider that the building would have a considerably greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt, than the existing buildings. In this respect and with reference to paragraph 89 of the Framework, the proposal cannot be considered as an exception and so is inappropriate development which would be harmful to openness. I attach substantial weight to the harm to the Green Belt in the consideration of this appeal.

The effects of the proposal on the setting of the adjacent listed building

8. The listed building at the core of the school is said to date from the early to mid 18th Century, with later extensions. It forms a handsome and attractive focal point of the site. Its special interest derives from its age, its attractive form and design and its parkland setting is a positive contributor. The brick garden wall is also listed Grade II.
9. There have been a number of extensions and separate buildings erected on the site and I had the opportunity to view these at the Hearing. To the immediate rear of the main listed building 3 pre-fabricated buildings have been sited. Their removal would have a positive effect on the setting of the listed building as they are so close to its rear that they obscure some of this elevation.
10. The new building would be sited around 50m from the main listed building; whilst inter-visibility between the 2 would be very limited, it would be possible to view both the main and new buildings in the same view from various parts of the site and I was taken to these points at the Hearing. From the playing fields to the north (rear) of the main listed building there is a strong impression of a line beyond which buildings have not intruded; in other terms, beyond which the site is predominantly open and free from buildings. Whilst views to the listed building are partially interrupted here, it can be seen and the impression is of the parkland surroundings being retained beyond the tightly grouped buildings. This impression is strengthened by the presence of a large number of trees on the proposal site and immediately adjacent to it.

11. The proposal would be seen as quite separate from the existing group of buildings and it would extend significantly further to the north than the main group that I have described. The existing very modest buildings here hardly make an impact at all. The proposal would have a considerable impact due to its 2 storey form, its separation from the main group and its effect would be heightened due to the removal of a significant number of trees. The Council are also critical of its design. In my view, its position here would demand a building of less harsh and commercial appearance, even though it may share characteristics of others on the site. In this way I consider that there would be a negative effect on the setting of the listed building. This needs to be weighed against the positive effects of the removal of the pre-fabricated buildings to the rear of the listed building; in my view, the harm arising from the imposition of the proposed building would outweigh the benefits of the removal of the 3 buildings. I have taken account of the appellant's stated intention to add further trees to the site, but there appears to be little prospect of doing so in the vicinity of the proposed building due to restrictions around it and the desire to retain some outlook from the proposed building. Therefore, taken as a whole, the proposal would fail to preserve the setting of the listed building.

Whether there are other matters sufficient to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm

12. The appellant points out that a number of the existing classrooms are accommodated in outmoded buildings and there is a need to provide a modern and attractive learning environment for pupils. The current arrangement means that certain year-groups have to walk some distance to access facilities. I have also had regards to sections within the Framework which encourage support for business, choice in schools and sustainable methods of building construction.
13. I have taken careful account of the benefits of the proposal and have sought to balance these against the harm that I have identified. In my judgement the other matters are insufficient to clearly outweigh the harm that would arise to the Green Belt and insufficient to outweigh the harm to the setting of the listed building. Therefore, the very special circumstance necessary to justify the development do not exist. Consequently, the appeal scheme is contrary to the aims of Policies CS13 and CS14 of the Core Strategy and Policies C1, C4 and E16 of the Local Plan and to the advice in the Framework. As a result, the appeal is dismissed.

S T Wood

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

T Rust
B Elbourn
J Stevens

TJR Planning
Elbourn Architects
Edge Grove School

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

A Smith
A Robley

Senior Planning Officer
Conservation Officer

DOCUMENTS

- 1 Table of figures
- 2 Email containing figures