



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 October 2025

by **O Marigold BSc DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/25/3372519

The Old Thatch, Lower Sandhurst Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham RG40 3TH

- 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 and Mrs R Westell against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 251135.
 - The development proposed is erection of replacement dwelling and car port following demolition of existing dwelling and outbuildings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The Landscape Character Area¹ (LCA), within which the appeal site lies, includes quiet rural lanes and a low-density, sparse pattern of development. The site consists of a dwelling located on a rural track, Drift Lane, off Lower Sandhurst Road. The appeal property dates from the late Victorian era. It is partly of two storeys, and has previously been extended to the rear. Even so, the dwelling has low eaves, a thatched roof, and an articulated mass, with its main section having long, narrow proportions. It is also positioned on a sloping landform, fronting the unmade track. As a result, the dwelling has an attractive, rural cottage appearance.
4. The proposal seeks to demolish the existing building and to erect a replacement dwelling. It would have features such as a traditional hipped roof and an external chimney breast, and would use timber sash windows and brick walls with quoins. The new house would have taller ridge and eaves heights than the existing dwelling. It would replace outbuildings, thereby focusing the location of built form, and with a modest set back in siting compared to the current dwelling.
5. The Council's Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), adopted June 2012, identifies a 50% increase in volume as being acceptable. However, this guidance relates to single-storey development, which does not include the proposal. Nevertheless, the SPD generally seeks to minimise the impact of buildings on the countryside.

¹ Of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment, November 2019

6. Policy CP11 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (WBCS), adopted January 2010, seeks to restrict development outside of settlement limits, as here. Amongst other things, CP11(5) does not permit a replacement dwelling unless it either (i) brings about environmental improvements, or (ii) does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original dwelling.
7. In the absence of an alternative, I take 'original' to refer to the situation in 1948, as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework, rather than its size today. The appellants calculate that the proposal would result in a 36% increase in floorspace. However, this figure includes extensions undertaken to the house after 1948. Excluding these, the proposal would result in a significant increase in the scale of the dwelling from its original form, calculated to be a 154% uplift in volume.
8. Moreover, the taller two-storey form and higher ridge line of the proposal would extend across the elevations, resulting in a building with a much larger and more dominant and bulky mass, including when seen from Drift Lane. It would also have a larger footprint when compared to the original. As such, the scale and design of the proposal would be harmful, especially compared to the attractive form of the current dwelling, and its lower, softer profile.
9. For these reasons, the proposal would have an excessive size, form and footprint. It would negatively formalise and erode the bucolic, rural appearance of the site and its surroundings, as would the proposed levelling of the sloping, natural appearance of the landform at present. Consequently, the proposal would appear incongruous and would fail to comply with policy CP11(5)(ii).
10. Other large replacement dwellings have been approved in the area. At Broomfield on Lower Sandhurst Road, the Council approved² a contemporary house with a very large increase in size. That said, although within the same LCA, The Old Thatch does not front Lower Sandhurst Road but is separate from it, being further along Drift Lane. This gives it a somewhat more secluded and rural feel. Furthermore, whilst Broomfield is set back from Lower Sandhurst Road, the appeal property fronts onto Drift Lane, meaning that the proposed increase in mass would have a greater visual impact.
11. There are established large dwellings further along Drift Lane, at Hilton House and Red Barn House. However, these are set well back and amongst vegetation, limiting their impact. Comparatively large replacement dwellings have been approved elsewhere at Barn Farm, Hurst³ and Foxley Farm, Binfield⁴. That said, I have only limited details of these schemes and, in contrast to the proposal before me, both replacements were found to be visually acceptable. For these reasons, the examples cited do not change my conclusions.
12. WBCS policy CP11(5)(i) permits replacement dwellings that result in environmental improvements. The proposal would enhance energy efficiency, and have lower carbon emissions, than would be achievable for the existing property. Nevertheless, there is no dispute that the appellants' assessment does not consider the whole-life or embodied carbon impacts of the proposal, such as demolition, site clearance and ground works, to show an overall reduction. Ecological enhancements of the type proposed are not contingent on the proposal.

² LPA reference 173566

³ LPA reference 221221

⁴ PINS reference APP/X0360/W/20/3252719

Furthermore, I have already found that the development would cause environmental harm, namely to the character and appearance of the area. WBCS policy CP11(5)(i) is therefore not met.

13. For the reasons given above, the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, it would conflict with WBCS policy CP11, as well as policies CP1 and CP3, which require development to be appropriate in terms of mass, built form, height and character. For the same reasons, it would conflict with the SPD, and with draft policies SS1, SS5 and DH1 of the Wokingham Borough Emerging Local Plan, which make similar requirements to the adopted WBCS policies.
14. Policy CC01 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD), adopted February 2014, sets out a presumption in favour of development. However, as there are relevant Development Plan policies with which I have found conflict, this policy does not provide support for the proposal. MDD policy CC02 defines Development Limits for each settlement. However, it does not make specific requirements relevant to the proposal, and so I find no conflict with this policy.

Other Matters

15. The proposal would result in a more efficient use of the land, and would provide a self-build dwelling, although no mechanism is before me to secure this. Its construction would contribute to the local economy, but relates to only one property. I therefore give these benefits only limited weight, and they do not overcome my concerns above.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons given, I have found conflict with the Development Plan as a whole. The material considerations in this case, and the weight I give to them, do not indicate a decision other than in accordance with the Development Plan. This leads me to conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

O Marigold

INSPECTOR