



Appeal Decision

Inquiry opened on 2 February 2010
Site visits made on 3 & 4 February 2010

by **Richard Clegg BA(Hons) DMS MRTPI**

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

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Decision date:
10 March 2010

Appeal Ref: APP/K0425/A/09/2115231

Former De La Rue Printing Works, Coates Lane, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP13 5EZ

- 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 P J Carey (Contractors) Ltd against the decision of Wycombe District Council.
- The application Ref 09/05144/FUL, dated 23 January 2009, was refused by notice dated 22 July 2009.
- The development proposed is redevelopment to provide 158 residential units (40 one bedroom flats, 93 two bedroom flats, 4 two bedroom houses, 14 three bedroom houses, 7 four bedroom houses), including new access arrangements, associated landscaping and car parking.
- The inquiry sat for two days, on 2 & 3 February 2010.

Decision

1. I dismiss the appeal.

Procedural matters

2. On the application form, the location of the site is simply given as Coates Lane in High Wycombe. At the inquiry, the main parties agreed that it is more clearly referred to as the former De La Rue Printing Works, and I have identified it accordingly in the appeal details above.
3. The appellant now proposes the planting of several trees instead of ground cover and shrub planting along much of the frontage of block A, and these details are shown on the revised landscape strategy plan (ref 13149-L01J) and the additional detailed landscape drawing (ref 13149-L07A) submitted in appendix 1 to Mr Chard's proof of evidence. The revision would not substantially alter the nature of the overall landscaping scheme, and the Council had no objection to it being considered as part of the appeal. I am satisfied that consideration of the revised plans would not cause prejudice to the interest of any parties, and I have, therefore, taken them into account in determining the appeal.
4. A planning obligation in the form of an agreement was submitted at the inquiry. The obligation concerns highway widening on Hughenden Avenue, the provision of a car park for Hughenden Park, arrangements for affordable housing, the retention of the adjacent part of the former De La Rue site for employment purposes, connection of the flats to a combined heat and power scheme, and financial contributions towards environmental improvements, education and fire services.

Main issue

5. Reasons for refusal Nos 2-4 are concerned with the provision of infrastructure contributions, affordable housing, a public car park for Hughenden Park, the provision of a combined heat and power scheme, and highway improvements at the proposed junction with Hughenden Avenue. The Council advised that, following conclusion of the planning obligation, it would not be pursuing these reasons for refusal. The planning obligation does not provide for contributions towards open space and indoor sport/leisure facilities, which are referred to in the second reason for refusal, but the Council explained that it had come to the view that it was not appropriate to seek them in this case.
6. In the light of the position on reasons for refusal Nos 2-4, I consider that the main issue in this case is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, and in particular on the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Planning policy

7. The Development Plan includes The South East Plan, the Wycombe Development Framework Core Strategy, and the saved policies of the Wycombe District Local Plan to 2011 which have not been replaced by policies in the Core Strategy. As part of its Local Development Framework (LDF), the Council is preparing a Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD). A Preferred Options document was published in February 2007, followed by an Update Consultation last year. The Update Consultation explains that it is confined to new issues and issues where there have been significant changes, and the two documents should be read together to obtain the full scope of the emerging DPD. Policy CS 4.2 of the Core Strategy identifies the Hughenden District, within which the appeal site lies, as one of three key areas of change. In November 2007, the Council adopted the Hughenden Quarter Concept Statement¹, which sets out principles and options for development in this part of High Wycombe.
8. The appeal site extends up to the northern edge of the built-up area on Coates Lane. The whole of the former printing works² is included within an employment area identified under saved Policy E3 of the Local Plan. Within these areas, the policy intends that planning permission should not be granted for proposals falling outside use classes B1, B2 and B8. More recent policies reveal a changing position towards redevelopment in the Hughenden Quarter. In the Core Strategy, Policy CS 4.2 seeks to establish a new road and a green corridor through this area, and, in addition to retaining land for business, the justification to the policy explains that the opportunity should be taken to locate uses there that would benefit from its accessibility. In the Preferred Options, the area is identified for mixed use, under Policy A 5. Business and residential uses are specified in the development principles, and redevelopment should also deliver the green corridor, an avenue between Coates Lane and Hughenden Avenue, and a car park for Hughenden Park. These elements are

¹ The Concept Statement has not been the subject of public consultation, and does not form part of the Development Plan, but it follows principles established in the Preferred Options edition of the DPD.

² The former printing works is larger than the appeal site. The southern part of the De La Rue site has outline planning permission for redevelopment for commercial purposes, and, apart from the strip where a new road is proposed to be built, the greater part of this land is outside the appeal site.

included in Policy MU17 of the Update Consultation, which is concerned with the De La Rue site. This policy also explains that approximately 70% of the developable area should be for residential uses on the northern end of the site. A detailed analysis of the area and how it could be developed is included in the Concept Statement.

9. To the north of Coates Lane is Hughenden Park, which is part of a wider area of open land. The park is part of the Hughenden Manor park of special historic interest and Hughenden Manor Conservation Area. It also lies within the Green Belt and the Chilterns AONB. Policies in the Development Plan seek to safeguard the AONB, parks and gardens of special historic interest and conservation areas. Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2) makes it clear that the visual amenities of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals which are conspicuous from within it.

Reasons

Character and appearance

10. The appeal site comprises the greater part of the former printing works, which occupies a stretch of land between Hughenden Avenue in the south and Coates Lane in the north. It extends across Coates Lane to the north-east, where it includes a former car park, a redundant Council depot and the dwelling at No 10 Coates Lane. There are also former parking areas on the south side of Coates Lane, but most of the site is occupied by closely grouped factory and office buildings. On each side of the site, conventional housing extends back from Coates Lane. The site lies on the western side of the valley floor where there is a retaining wall, with the housing beyond Coates Lane to the west set at a higher level than the buildings on the appeal site. Away from the road, the open land rises to the north-west and the north-east across Hughenden Park. The park is characterised by individual and small groups of trees scattered across its slopes, and there is tree cover along the northern side of Coates Lane. Public access is freely available across the park, and a public footpath runs through the site itself, alongside the eastern side of the factory buildings.
11. The scheme would involve the construction of a new road, following the general line of the public footpath from Hughenden Avenue to Coates Lane. On the western side of the road, three blocks of apartments are proposed (blocks A, B and C), with pairs and short terraces of two-storey housing on the eastern side (blocks D, E, F and G). At the north-eastern end of the site, a car park with spaces for public use would be provided. A main area of dispute between the appellant and other parties concerns block A. This block of apartments would be between three and five storeys high and would be positioned on the site of the existing office building and part of the factory at the north-western end of the site.
12. The proposal would include high density development at blocks A, B & C, and a net density in excess of 115 dwellings per hectare (dph) was calculated by the Council for this part of the site. Both main parties agreed that, in general, the density and height of development tends to increase towards the centre of urban areas, and they made reference to the Urban Design Compendium (UDC) in respect of their arguments about the appropriateness of a high density

development in this location. Table 3.3 of the UDC sets out a density matrix, which includes flats with a range of 80-120 dph in suburban locations. The second volume of the UDC refers, in section 2.4, to 70 and 80dph as high densities. In neither case, however, is the UDC indicating that certain densities are only appropriate in certain types of location. The UDC refers to two key messages – the need to relate densities to context and the need to provide a mix of densities within larger developments. The appeal proposal meets the second point, including two-storey housing in addition to the apartment blocks. Having regard to the change in level and the presence of the tree belt to the west, the line of the new road which would pass through rather than being contained within the development, and the extent of the existing built form of the former printing works, I am satisfied that the western part of the site could satisfactorily accommodate a higher level of density than that of the nearby suburban housing. Policy H8 of the Local Plan seeks a net density above 50dph where there is good public transport accessibility, and there is no suggestion that this would not be a sustainable location for new housing. Indeed the Update Consultation of the DPD refers to the Hughenden Quarter as a location that benefits from good access to the town centre and the bus station. Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) refers to 30dph simply as a national indicative minimum, and explains that the density of existing development should not dictate that of new housing by stifling change or requiring replication of existing style of form.

13. The appellant's architect referred to the scheme fulfilling the urban design objective of enclosure of Hughenden Park at this point. By Design, which is a companion guide to national planning policy, sets out a series of objectives for urban design, one of which is *To promote the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas*. Hughenden Park lies beyond the built-up area, and it is not an urban space but part of the wider countryside to the north of High Wycombe. The appellant's witnesses explained that in this location, enclosure should be interpreted as the provision of a meaningful frontage and completion of the building line. There is a clearly defined edge to the town along this part of Coates Lane, and the principle of the erection of an apartment block at the northern end of the appeal site would reinforce the continuity of a strong building line. It would contribute to the definition of the urban edge, which would be consistent with the objectives in By Design. Coates Lane is the boundary of the Green Belt, which extends across Hughenden Park and beyond. The presence of an apartment block within the built-up area on the opposite side of the road, and forming part of the line of built development on the edge of the town would not encroach on the openness of the Green Belt.
14. I turn now to consider the specific proposal for block A. Apart from a single storey element, the existing offices are set further back from Coates Lane on the western side of the site. Here, block A, which would turn the corner with the alignment of Coates Lane, would be further forward than the existing main office building. Its position, though, would be consistent with the line of the road and existing frontage development, and in consequence I consider that this aspect of the scheme would improve the legibility of the local built environment. The existing three storey office building is 10-11m tall, whereas block A would vary between 9.15m at each end, where there would be three storeys, to 14.85m at the five storey central section. Much of the proposed

building would have four storeys, with a height of 12.15m. The plans indicate that the central section of the building would be similar in length to the main office building. This part of block A would be four and five storeys high, with the building continuing with four storeys over half-way along each of the side wings. The appellant's architect has explained that the fifth storey would occupy 25% of the total frontage, and I note that these two flats would be set back at least 5m from the main front elevation. In consequence, views of the top floor of the building would be restricted from nearby vantage points, but as the appellant's photomontages show, it would be visible from within Hughenden Park. Block A would be a markedly more substantial structure than the existing main office building. Although it would step down at each end, the greater part of the building would be appreciably taller in height.

15. I do not share the concerns of the Council in respect of the detailed design of block A. Both the front and rear elevations would be well articulated, and the range of materials and pattern of fenestration would provide a suitable treatment for the building. Far from being inappropriate in this location, the balconies would add interest to the appearance of the building. It was suggested by both the Council and The Chilterns Conservation Board that the use of balconies for the storage of certain large items of domestic equipment and the drying of washing would detract from the public front of the building. Given the aspect from these balconies, I consider it unlikely that they would be used for any purpose which would obstruct the views over Hughenden Park, and in any event it is intended that an estate management strategy, which could be the subject of a condition, would control the use of balconies and terraces.
16. Nevertheless, I consider that, given its mass and height, block A would represent a highly urban form of development. There are public views towards the position of this building from a wide area across Hughenden Park, and from the public footpath on the far side of the A4128 to the north-east. From the north-western part of the park, only glimpses of the office building on the appeal site were apparent during my visits, which took place when there was little leaf cover. Having regard to the disposition and extent of tree cover, I consider that the greater bulk of block A would also be satisfactorily filtered in views from this area. Views with fewer interruptions from tree cover are available from the north-east in the park. The photomontage from viewpoint 3, which is in this part of the park, indicates a restricted view, but on my visit to this area, I observed that from elsewhere in this direction, the existing offices can be readily seen. Accordingly, I consider that from this area block A would be a significant and abrupt feature at the southern end of the park during the winter months. From the southern part of the park, just beyond Coates Lane, block A would be distinct in views during winter, and the appellant's winter photomontage from viewpoint 2 shows that, because of its height, block A would mask the upper part of tree cover beyond the building which currently assists in lessening the impact of the existing offices. Even when the trees are in leaf, I consider it likely that parts of the building would be apparent from certain viewpoints and would indicate the presence of a substantial structure. In reaching these views, I have taken into account the additional tree cover which is proposed in front of block A.