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15 May 2021

Dear Sirs

MO/2021/0424 – The Observatory, Old Bury Hill, Westcott, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 3JU
Erection of a 'tree house' for holiday let

I write in my capacity as planning lead for Westcott Village Association (WVA). WVA occasionally makes representations, as consultee, on behalf of the Westcott community, particularly where Westcott Neighbourhood Development Plan policy might be relevant.

Members of our community have aired significant concern and WVA therefore met to discuss the application. We are writing to ask MVDC to refuse permission.

We have read the comprehensive design and access statement prepared by Blue Forest. The application is for a freestanding timber framed and clad two bedroom "tree house" for holiday let on stilts. As such it does not appear to be a tree house in the traditional sense.

The Blue Forest statement places significant emphasis on the arboriculture, ecology and sensitivity of the woodland setting and the required mitigations. However, we are concerned

that the Blue Forest statement is missing the planning policy context. The application site falls within:-

- Green Belt
- An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- An Area of Great Landscape Value

The application site (marked with a blue cross below) also falls within the curtilage of the Grade 2 Listed Old Bury Hill House and the original formal grounds of the wider estate. The Statement references the site being within the curtilage of The Observatory. It is, but we believe the dominant curtilage, in a conservation sense, is probably Old Bury Hill House which the application site is also closer to.



The relevant Mole Valley policy context is Policy CS13 – Landscape Character

Policy CS 13 Landscape Character

1. All new development must respect and, where appropriate, enhance the character and distinctiveness of the landscape character area in which it is proposed. Landscape enhancement works may be required to avoid adverse impacts associated with new developments.
2. The Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is of national significance, and as such, the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape will be a priority in this area. The AONB will be protected in accordance with the objectives in Planning Policy Statement 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas) and the Surrey Hills Management Plan, with particular focus on the impact of development on ridgelines, significant views, peace, tranquillity and levels of artificial light.
3. The AGLV (Area of Great Landscape Value) will be retained until such time as there has been a review of the AONB boundary. Development in the AGLV area will be required to be supported by evidence to demonstrate that it would not result in harm to the AONB, particularly views from and into the AONB and the key features identified in point 2 above.
4. Small scale development for the reasonable needs of the rural economy, outdoor recreation as well as that for the local community in the AONB or AGLV, will be supported subject to meeting other relevant criteria within the LDF.

Policy WNDP 5 in the Westcott Neighbourhood Development Plan may also be considered relevant. The background to this policy was to facilitate the re-purposing of aging community assets in Westcott for the benefit of our community, not for this type of application.

6.5. Objective 5

6.5.1. This policy is to encourage and assist appropriate use of Green Belt land for the enjoyment and recreation of local residents. It is consistent with relevant sections of the NPPF and with the development plan. The policy provides the opportunity for community-driven and supported projects which would meet the recreational and leisure needs of the local community.

6.5.2. **Policy WNDP5:** Recreational Development

WNDP5: Within the Metropolitan Green Belt appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation will be supported where such proposals preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

6.5.3. **Justification:** Westcott Ward covers some of the most spectacular and open countryside in Surrey and is much sought after as both a place to live as well as a place to enjoy leisure and recreational activities.

6.5.4. Great care is to be taken to protect the Green Belt; this policy will give preference to the provision of land for domestic horticulture (allotments), sporting activities and leisure, all of which have been identified as popular activities by residents in the Survey.

The proposed “tree house” is a significant structure. The internal floor area is 45 sq m with additional deck space of 44 sq m (on two levels) c. 2.5 metres above ground level. The peak of the roof will be 6.7m above ground level.

We have noted the consent last year (MO2020/0621) for the conversion of an existing four bay garage at The Observatory into a “granny annexe” ancillary to the residential dwelling and we trust it will stay this way. Garaging for The Observatory is now provided in a separate double garage and the requirement to keep one bay as a part of the granny annexe.

We believe the acceptability (or otherwise) of this application is probably marginal at best based on Policy CS13. Nor does it meet the “very special circumstances” required to make the case for development on the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF.

We appeal to MVDC to refuse permission and not create potentially unhelpful precedent.

Yours sincerely,

James Leaver
Planning Lead, Westcott Village Association