



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 May 2009

by Chris Frost BSc(Hons) DipLD FLI CBiol
MIBiol MRTPI

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

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Decision date:
22 May 2009

Appeal Ref: APP/C3620/A/08/2090058

Hartsfield Manor, Sandy Lane, Betchworth, Surrey RH3 7AA

- 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 De Vere Venues Ltd against the decision of Mole Valley District Council.
- The application Ref MO/2008/0447/CU, dated 12 March 2008, was refused by notice dated 13 May 2008.
- The development proposed is a change of use to a conference/training centre and hotel.

Decision

1. I allow the appeal, and grant planning permission for a change of use to a conference/training centre and hotel at Hartsfield Manor, Sandy Lane, Betchworth, Surrey RH3 7AA, in accordance with the terms of the application Ref MO/2008/0447/CU, dated 12 March 2008, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the conditions listed in the schedule to this decision.

Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect the proposed change of use would have in terms of the convenience of residents in Betchworth and the environmental character of surrounding country roads as a result of additional traffic generation.

Reasons

3. Hartsfield Manor provides training and conference facilities and has 50 bedrooms. These facilities are under-used at times (particularly at week-ends and in holiday seasons). The addition of the proposed hotel use (which appears to have already commenced as there is evidence that the venue is being marketed as an hotel venue) would provide additional hotel facilities in the area and enable the site to operate on a stronger commercial footing.
4. It is acknowledged that the extended use of Hartsfield Manor would result in an increase in the amount of traffic visiting the site (particularly at week-ends and in holiday seasons). The appellants consider that vehicle numbers would nevertheless remain relatively low and that this would have no noticeable impact upon local amenity. However, the Council consider that the number of vehicles along Sandy Lane would increase by 21% on a Saturday and 18% on a Sunday (although there is some dispute on the precision of these figures). The Council considers that the increase would be significant and would mar the enjoyment of outdoor leisure pursuits such as cycling, walking and horse riding and cause inconvenience to residents.

5. I accept that in this rural area any significant additional traffic would be likely to diminish the ambience associated with generally narrow lanes within an area of Green Belt countryside that provides a pleasant contrast to more built-up areas. However, it seems fair to describe background traffic flows as low in volume and it is therefore understandable that this should be regarded as compatible with providing a pleasant ambience that is compatible with leisure uses. Traffic increases associated with the hotel would be most significant at week-ends but even then the increases are not projected to bring traffic levels materially above those currently experienced on weekdays¹. Against this background I find no reason to support the view that likely increases in traffic would have a material effect on the enjoyment of the area or the environmental quality of local rural roads or the convenience of local residents.
6. Saved Local Plan policy MOV2 expects that development should be compatible with the environmental character of the area. I find no reason to demonstrate that this compatibility would not be achieved. Saved Local Plan policy ENV22 seeks to protect local amenities and refers to traffic and other adverse environmental impact. Here, additional traffic would be created, but this would not be likely to result in any significant new environmental impact as overall traffic levels would remain low. Accordingly, I find that the requirements of this policy would be adequately respected. Saved Local Plan policy REC22 is more concerned with extensions to existing hotels, but is concerned to avoid harm to the environmental character of country roads. Again I find that this requirement would be adequately respected. The lack of conflict with relevant policies suggests that planning permission should be granted, subject to conditions.
7. I am aware that there are wide ranging local concerns relating to this development that are not all reflected in the Council's reasons for refusal. While there are strong feelings related to the use of the site as an hotel, subject to conditions I do not find that there is sufficient reason to prevent the proposed change of use from being allowed when judged against the relevant policy background.
8. Various conditions are suggested by the Council relating to matters of amenity and highway safety and the appellants' agent has indicated that these are acceptable. I shall impose these while taking account of the advice given in Circular 11/95. With this in mind, I do not accept that it would be appropriate to require the payment of a fee to the Council by way of a condition, as is suggested in the wording of condition 7. Also, as there is evidence to suggest that the change of use has already taken effect, a commencement condition appears to be unnecessary.

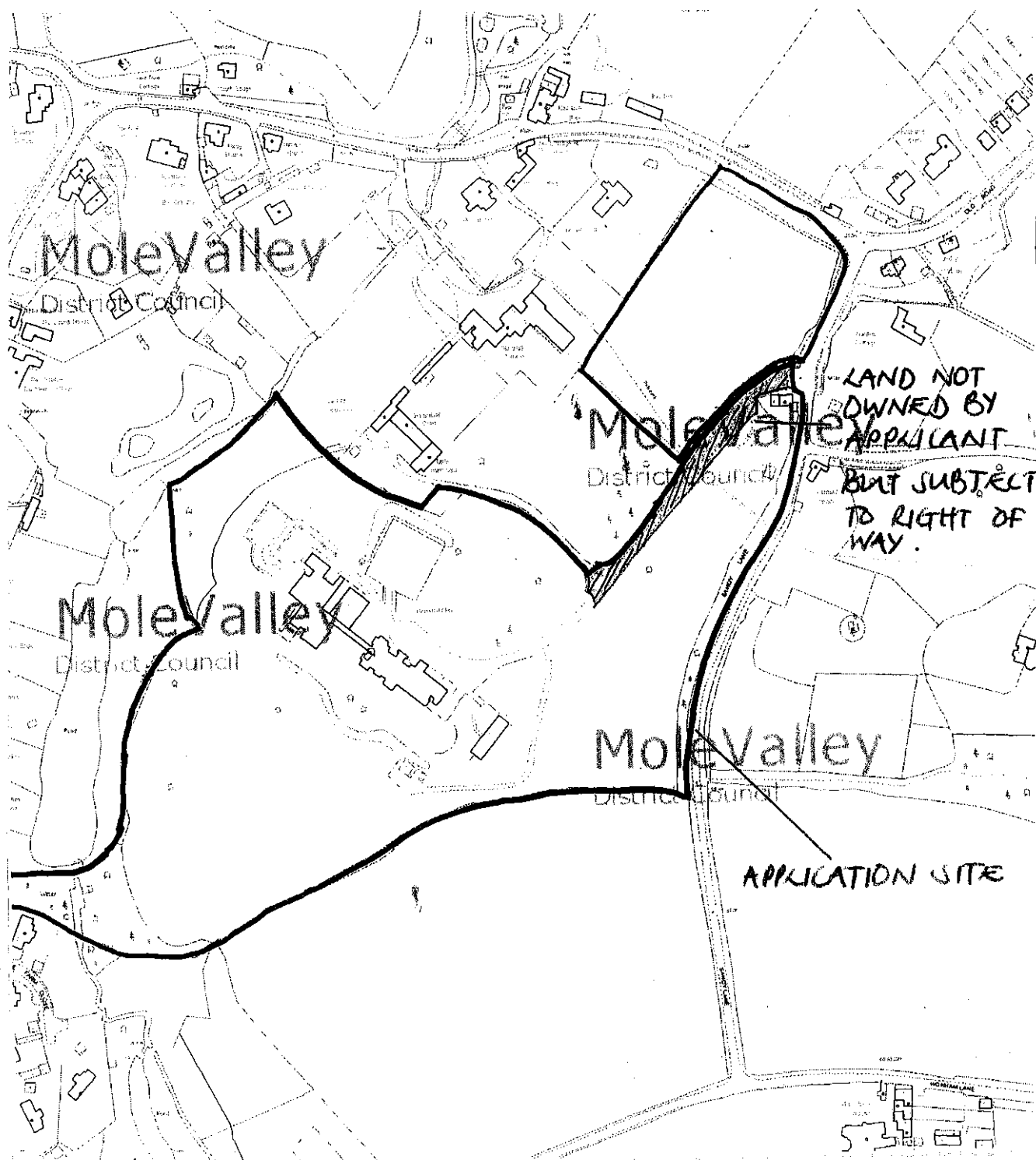
Chris Frost

Inspector

¹ Recorded flows may include an element of hotel use, but nevertheless can be characterised as low

Schedule of Conditions

- 1) Car parking facilities on the site shall not be used for the parking of cars belonging to persons who are absent from the premises for periods in excess of 24 hours without the prior written approval of the local planning authority.
- 2) No amplified music or speech shall be played outside the buildings at any time.
- 3) Fireworks shall not be ignited on the site at any time other than on 5 November prior to 22:00hrs and on New Years Eve and New Years Day up until 00:30hrs without the prior written approval of the local planning authority.
- 4) The change of use shall cease to have effect unless highway pedestrian warning signs are erected in accord with a scheme to be submitted to the local planning authority for written approval within 3 months of this decision. Following the written approval of the local planning authority the approved scheme shall be implemented in accord with a timetable to be specified in writing by the local planning authority.
- 5) Within 3 months of this decision proposals for the improvement of the existing vehicular access shall be submitted to the local planning authority for written approval. Following the written approval of the local planning authority the approved scheme shall be completed in accord with a timetable to be specified in writing by the local planning authority, failing which the change of use shall cease to have effect. The completed scheme shall thereafter be retained as approved.
- 6) A travel plan shall be submitted to the local planning authority for written approval within 3 months of this decision. Following the written approval of the local planning authority the approved plan shall be implemented in accord with a timetable to be specified in writing by the local planning authority, failing which the change of use shall cease to have effect.



SITE LOCATION PLAN FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY – DIMENSIONS NOT TO BE SCALED.

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M0/2008/0447/CU

**APPEAL SITE : HARTSFIELD MANOR,
SANDY LANE, BETCHWORTH**

APPEAL ALLOWED



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Dated

22 May 2009