
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 October 2016

by Thomas Bristow BA MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 17 November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/T0355/D/16/3157641

**Westwood House, Walgrove Gardens, White Waltham, Maidenhead
SL6 3SL**

- 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 Ian Affleck against the decision of the Council of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
 - The application Ref 16/01347, dated 21 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is a first floor side extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the description of development in the banner heading above as that used in the Council's decision notice. This accurately describes the proposal and omits the discussion within the description given in the original application form regarding the status of adjacent land.
3. During my site visit I viewed Westwood House and its surroundings from public vantage points. The appellant has not subsequently submitted additional information related to proposal as viewed from within the garden of Westwood House, and as such I am satisfied that the information before me is an appropriate basis upon which to reach a decision.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - 1) whether or not the proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt,
 - 2) the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, and
 - 3) if the proposal represents inappropriate development, whether the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
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Reasons

5. Built in 1976, Westwood House is a substantial two storey detached property located within a suburban residential area of the village of White Waltham which falls within the Green Belt. Whilst there is notable variety in the design of nearby properties, the area is nonetheless characterised by a relatively low level of density with dwellings typically of more modest scale than that of Westwood House.
6. Surrounding properties are generally set within comparatively spacious plots with open frontages. The generous spaces between dwellings, the existence of undeveloped parcels of land falling occasionally between properties, and the presence of relatively open views of the countryside from various locations around the village lend it an open and semi-rural character.

Whether or not the proposal represents inappropriate development

7. Paragraph 89 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (the 'Framework') establishes that the construction of new buildings is inappropriate in the Green Belt and identifies certain types of development which are exceptions to this position. One such exception is *'the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original dwelling'*.
8. This approach is essentially the same as that of saved policies GB1 and GB4 of *The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Local Plan (incorporating alterations adopted in June 2003)* adopted originally in July 1999 (the 'Local Plan'). As such, and notwithstanding that the Local Plan is of some vintage, it is nevertheless appropriate to accord full weight to these policies in this decision.¹
9. Neither within the Framework nor Local Plan are there exact metrics set as to what would constitute a *'disproportionate'* addition. However the supporting text at paragraphs 2.1.26 and 2.1.27 of saved policy GB4 identifies several factors that will be relevant in considering whether an extension would appear disproportionate (whilst making clear that all proposals must be considered on a case-by-case basis).
10. These factors include, with reference to the surrounding context, the floorspace proposed compared to that of the original dwelling taking account of previous extensions, the scale of the proposal, its bulk and its prominence. In my view these are useful indicators in determining whether or not an extension would appear disproportionate, accorded its ordinary meaning, and I have therefore approached the appeal with regard to these considerations.
11. The original floorspace of Westwood House as built was 196 square metres. Through subsequent extensions the property has been enlarged by 151 square metres, amounting to approximately a 77 per cent increase in floorspace. The proposal before me is for an extension which would comprise a further 23 square metres of floorspace, amounting in combination with previous extensions to an increase of approximately 88 per cent in floorspace beyond

¹ With reference to paragraph 215 of the Framework.

that of the original property. These figures are not disputed. Whilst in itself this increase is not determinative, clearly the proposal would result in the original property having been significantly enlarged.

12. Being a first floor extension above an existing single storey element of the property, the proposal would not increase the footprint of Westwood House. However the overall scale of the property would inevitably be increased. This is significant as it appeared to me from my site visit that Westwood House is atypically large at present in comparison to the more modest prevailing scale of properties within the surrounding area (particularly those also served by Walgrove Gardens). The proposal would increase this disparity.
13. I acknowledge that the extension has been designed so as to be slightly set-back and set-down from the building line and ridgeline of the main element of the property respectively. However this set-back and set-down is limited, and the window within the proposed extension and the eaves thereof would be broadly in line with those features currently present at second storey level. Consequently the proposal would appear visually as more of a continuation of the existing bulk of the property than as a subservient addition to it.
14. Certain views of the extension would be limited by the presence of intervening trees within the plot of the property. Nevertheless I observed during my site visit that the proposal would be clearly visible from various vantage points along Walgrove Gardens. From these vantage points the proposal would clearly add to the perceived bulk of the property.
15. Whilst the extension would be comparatively modest it is nonetheless significant with regard to the particular context in which it is proposed. Consequently in terms of size relative to the property at present, and with regard to the scale, bulk, and the prominence of the proposal, in my view the proposal would on balance amount to a disproportionate addition to the original dwelling.
16. I therefore conclude that the proposal represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt with reference to the relevant provisions of saved policies GB1 and GB4 of the Local Plan and to relevant elements of the Framework. Paragraph 87 of the Framework establishes that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and that it should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Openness

17. Saved policy GB2 of the Local Plan sets out that development within the Green Belt will not be permitted where it would result in a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt compared to present, or where it would lead to harm to the character of the countryside. Similarly the Framework sets out that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts, with the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy being to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence.
18. I have identified above that the scale, bulk and prominence of the proposal, in conjunction with previous extensions to the original property, would amount to

a disproportionate addition. Being visible from surrounding vantage points the proposal would therefore, albeit to a limited degree, reduce the open character of the area by virtue of the introduction of a built form where none is present.

19. Although on account of the largely flat topography of the surrounding land views of the open countryside in this particular location are not present, as identified above the low density pattern of development of the area and the spaces between properties are important characteristic features of the environment. The proposal would therefore erode the open and low density character of the area to a degree, and as a consequence reduce the perceived openness of the Green Belt.
20. Accordingly I conclude that the proposal would have a limited adverse effect on the openness of the Green Belt in conflict with saved policy GB2 of the Local Plan and with the approach in the Framework.
21. I have found that the proposal would result in harm to the Green Belt by virtue of being inappropriate development. Further harm would result from its effect upon the openness of the Green Belt, albeit that this additional harm would be limited. Paragraph 88 of the Framework requires that any harm to the Green Belt is given substantial weight, and that very special circumstances justifying harmful development will not exist unless any harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations. I turn to these below.

Other considerations

22. The proposal would clearly be of benefit to the occupants of the property in providing more spacious living accommodation, a benefit which carries some weight in its favour. However this is chiefly a private benefit and therefore does not, in my view, clearly outweigh the public harm that would result. Moreover there is nothing in the information before me to indicate that the continued comfortable domestic use of Westwood House would be compromised by the absence of such development.
23. I note the points made by the appellant that, in his view, the extension would '*improve the shape*' of the house and its consistency with those properties nearby which do not feature single storey elements. Whilst single storey elements of properties are not commonplace nearby, the design of properties in the vicinity is, as identified above, notably varied. Therefore the current form of Westwood House does not in my view detract from the character of the surrounding built environment, nor indeed would the extension. Consequently the change that would result from the proposal to the character and appearance of Westwood House and to the surrounding area is essentially neutral rather than weighs positively in favour of the proposal.
24. In conjunction with previous extensions the development proposed would result in Westwood House having been disproportionately extended. Whilst I also recognise that nearby residents have not objected to the proposal, this does not in and of itself render the development acceptable given that all proposals must be determined in line with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. I therefore consider that the lack of objection is therefore neutral in the balance of determining whether the proposal is acceptable.

25. On the balance of the evidence before me the harm to the Green Belt, to which substantial weight must be accorded in line with the approach in the Framework, would not be clearly outweighed by the limited weight that can be accorded to other considerations in favour of the proposal. Consequently very special circumstances have not been demonstrated, and the proposal therefore does not accord with the approach in saved policy GB1 of the Local Plan and with relevant elements of the Framework.

Conclusion

26. For the above reasons, and taking all other matters into account, the proposal conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole and with the approach in the Framework. The proposal does not represent sustainable development and I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Thomas Bristow

INSPECTOR