

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 December 2016

by P W Clark MA MRTPI MCMI

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

Decision date: 16 December 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/D/16/3160488

Meadow View Cottage, Chinthurst Lane, Bramley, Surrey GU5 0DR

- 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 Mr I Williams against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 16/P/01434, dated 6 July 2016, was refused by notice dated 14 September 2016.
 - The development proposed is two, two-storey side extensions.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. These are;
 - Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt
 - The effect of the proposal on
 - The openness of the Green Belt and on
 - The character and appearance of the dwelling
 - Whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations and, if so, whether this would amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

3. The proposal would be in the Green Belt. Paragraph 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) advises that the construction of new buildings is inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions include the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. Policy RE2 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan adopted in January 2003 similarly allows limited extensions, alteration or replacement of buildings in the Green Belt. Original building is defined in that plan as the dwelling and outbuildings as existing on 1st July 1948 or as first built if newer. There is a similar definition in the glossary to the NPPF.
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4. A survey drawing accompanying an application for a certificate of lawfulness in February 2010 shows a three-bedroomed, two-storey cottage under a hipped roof with an additional storey and a half lean-to and a single-storey utility room both of which have the appearance of being non-original additions. The drawing also shows a detached garage.
5. There is no information to show what the original building comprised but the building surveyed in 2010 had a footprint of about 61 sq m and a floorspace of about 110 sq m (the Council's officer report acknowledges 116.08 sq m). The garage had a footprint of about 25.5 sq m. Subsequently the building has been extensively extended under permitted development rights and now has a footprint of about 228 sq m and a floorspace of about 367 sq m (according to the Council, 359 sq m according to the appellant).
6. The proposal would enlarge the building still further, to a footprint of about 260 sq m and a floorspace of about 490 sq m (460 sq m according to the appellant). Overall, taking the building as surveyed in 2010 as the original building (which, if it is greater than in 1948, is an approach favourable to the appellant) the change from the original building as a result of the proposal would be an increase in footprint of about 326% and of 296% in floorspace (the Council's figure is 322%). Without the need for precise accuracy, it is clear that, however measured, whether by footprint or by floorspace an increase of about three times the size of the original dwelling is disproportionate and so the proposal would not comply with Local Plan policy RE2 and would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
7. The NPPF advises that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. I examine these in turn.

Openness

8. The openness of the Green Belt has two characteristics; an absence of physical development and also a visual perception of openness. As already mentioned, the building has already been extensively extended prior to the making of the current proposal. This would add a further 30 sq m or so of footprint, about 100 sq m or so of floorspace, so the physical extent of this development and therefore harm to this element of openness would be moderate.
9. The second element of openness is visual. Meadow View Cottage is sited within a bowl of land beneath a wood-topped hill. Although not prominent in the landscape, it stands alone and is only slightly screened by trees so is clearly visible for a couple of hundred metres around, not just from within Chinthurst Farm lands but also from the Downs Link public footpath which passes to its east.
10. Although the footprint of the development is moderate, much of its floorspace is at first floor level. In consequence, instead of appearing to view as a pavilion with low-spreading wings settling into the contours, the extended house would present a wide frontage at first floor level, its width emphasising its presence as a substantial obstruction to openness. I conclude that although the physical harm to openness would be moderate, its visual harm would be substantial.

Character and appearance

11. As already noted, the current appearance of the building, as extended under permitted development, is one of a square-built pavilion. Its substantial mass has little articulation but is moderated with low-spreading wings, in a manner which calls to mind many country houses. The proposal would elevate two of those low-spreading wings to form an extensive linear façade with very little articulation and so lessening its intrinsic character and interest. The harmful effect might not be large but it would be harm nonetheless and so would be contrary to Local Plan policy H9 which allows extensions if there would be no unacceptable effect on the scale or character of the dwelling.

Other considerations

12. The appellant makes reference to the use of new sustainable technology and insulation within the development. Whilst these are commendable they do not offer any planning benefit which would not be found in any new development. I conclude that there are insufficient other considerations which would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reasons of inappropriateness in principle and to openness both physical and visual and also to other harm to the character and appearance of the dwelling and so the very special circumstances necessary to justify allowing this appeal do not exist. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

P. W. Clark

Inspector