
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 May 2017

by H Porter BA(Hons) PGDip IHBC

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

Decision date: 20 June 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/W/17/3166547

Cutt Mill House, Suffield Lane, Surrey, Puttenham GU3 1BG

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Andrew Barnes against Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 16/P/00992, is dated 28 April 2016.
 - The development proposed is extension to existing house, providing additional bedrooms, wash house and media room.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr Andrew Barnes against Guildford Borough Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Procedural Matter

3. The Council had not determined the application prior to the appeal. During the course of the appeal proceedings, the Council confirmed that, had they been in a position to issue a decision, they would have recommended the proposed development for refusal. No third party representations have been made.
4. Reference was made in the appellant's Design and Access Statement to the Guildford Draft Local Plan, 2014. The Council have subsequently confirmed that this document is in the early stages of development and has not yet been submitted for examination. On this basis, and in line with the guidance at paragraph 216 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), I afford it very little weight.
5. The Council's Questionnaire provided a list of policies from the Guildford Borough Local Plan, adopted January 2003 (the Local Plan), as well as the Supplementary Planning Guidance: Residential Extensions, adopted 25 September 2003 (the SPG). I have therefore considered the appeal against the adopted development plan and national planning policy.

Main Issues

6. The Local Plan policies provided by the Council relate to development within the Green Belt, conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the distinctive landscape character of
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Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), the design requirements of extensions, as well as extensions within the countryside and general development standards. Against this background, I consider the main issues in this appeal to be:

- Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework and relevant development plan policies;
- The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
- The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host dwelling and surrounding area, including the AONB and AGLV; and
- If the proposal would be inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify it.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

7. Cutt Mill House is situated within the Metropolitan Green Belt, where development is strictly controlled. The Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate unless falling within a number of exceptions set out in paragraph 89 of the Framework, which includes the extension or alteration of a building. Policy RE2 of the Local Plan, is broadly consistent with the Framework in that it also establishes a general position that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate and so needs to be justified by very special circumstances, unless it is within certain exceptions. Criterion 3 of this Policy makes a provision for limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings.
8. Policy RE2 refers to Policy H9, which establishes a presumption against extensions in the Green Belt that would result in disproportionate additions, taking into account the size of the original dwelling. This is in-line with paragraph 89, which only provides an exception if the extension does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. The SPG also refers to Policy H9, as well as establishing that extensions are more restricted in the Green Belt and would not be allowed if they are disproportionate to the size of the original dwelling.
9. The appellant's Design and Access Statement details the incremental evolution of Cutt Mill since its earliest origins and establishes the gross external floor plan dimensions of the original house, as it existed on 1 July 1948, as being 518m². Accounting for 8m² demolition, the proposed front extension would add 264m² to the size of the original house, which would increase the gross external floor area of the original dwelling by over half. While there is not a numerical threshold against which to measure whether an extension would be disproportionate in either local policy or guidance, it is clear that the appeal scheme would substantially increase the size of the original dwelling.
10. The appeal scheme proposes a two-storey extension to project forward from the building's north-eastern wing, which would incorporate a store, wash

house, media room, office and WC on the ground floor, as well as three double en-suite bedrooms on the first. The proposed extension would not only significantly increase the building's footprint, it would also increase its overall height and bulk substantially by the provision of two storeys. Compared to the size of dwelling that existed prior to the 2011 extension, the proposal would add considerably to the overall amount of accommodation, increasing the number of rooms by over half again.

11. The size, scale and increase in accommodation, when considered in combination with the extant kitchen extension, would amount to disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. This would be contrary to Local Plan Policies H9 and RE2, as well as to the guidance in the SPG. Accordingly, I find upon the first main issue that the appeal proposal would not fall within the exceptions listed under paragraph 89 of the Framework. The proposal would therefore be inappropriate development within the Green Belt that is, by definition, harmful for the purposes of the development plan and national policies.

Openness

12. The Framework defines openness as an essential characteristic of Green Belts¹; and the supporting text to Policy RE2 establishes the Council's intention to maintain the open nature of the Green Belt. As above, the appeal proposal would effectively double the size of the existing dwelling, substantially increasing its bulk and volume. Moreover, the extension would project forwards of the existing building's main elevation, and would occupy an area of the site that is currently open and devoid of development. While various structures may have populated this area historically, and the site may not be readily visible from public vantage points other than a bridleway, it has been open and undeveloped since at least the designation of the Green Belt and associated policies to protect it.
13. Despite a lower ridge height than the main dwelling and gable detailing, by virtue of its orientation, length and bulk, the proposal would harmfully encroach upon this portion of undeveloped space. Taken with the previous extensions, including the triple-garage to the front of the property, the development would cumulatively contribute to a modest yet still appreciable reduction in the openness of the Green Belt. In contributing to a loss of openness of the Green Belt, the proposal would undermine one of its essential characteristics as defined in paragraph 79 of the Framework.

Character and appearance

14. The appeal site is situated in a semi-rural location, in a wooded valley landscape that forms part of the AONB and AGLV. Cutt Mill House is a handsome detached dwelling, standing in its own spacious grounds, bounded by dense greenery and a substantial mill pond. The site is accessed via a narrow lane, leading to an open, gravel and grassed forecourt containing a detached triple-garage and the remnants of the former mill, enclosed behind a brick boundary wall.
15. The house itself occupies a slightly elevated position and, while subject to various phases of development, in part reflected in its complicated roof form, is

¹ Paragraph 79

unified by a consistency of material treatment and in its broadly horizontal glazing pattern. The main elevation follows a strong building line, flat-fronted, articulated by a tall central gable feature. Extensions to the main body of the building are set well back, revealing a broad symmetry and sense of balance and linear planform. Despite its relatively large size, the building has a modest character and appearance, owing to simple detailing and restrained proportions.

16. The appeal scheme would project forward of the main body of the dwelling, bridging the mill leat and extending into the open courtyard area. The orientation of the extension would erode the linear planform as well as undermine that sense of balance and symmetry that currently characterises the frontage. While I note there is a rationale to reflect a historic sense of enclosure and the angle of the former watermill, the extension would have the effect of harmfully hemming-in the building's main frontage, undermining its character and appearance.
17. Despite having a slightly lower overall height compared to the main building, and gables intended to break up its overall bulk, it would have a notably long, continual ridge line. The numerous full-height gables, four on the east and two on the west elevation, would be dominant features, competing with the simple accent of the main central gable. Overall, there would be a notable disparity between the form of the existing building and the proposed extension, which would be read as a dominant and incongruous element.
18. While the material treatment and aspects of the detailed design respond to elements within the existing building, the overall pattern of fenestration and full-height gables would be overly complicated. The windows on the proposed east elevation predominantly have a narrow, horizontal emphasis, and along with the canted oriel and full-width gallery window, would be manifestly different from the existing fenestration.
19. The development would therefore result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the host dwelling. As such, the development would run contrary to Policy H9 of the Local Plan, as well as the SPG, which establishes that extensions to dwellings in the countryside should not have an unacceptable effect on the scale and character of the dwelling, complement the size, shape of the existing property, and ensure they are subordinate to it.
20. The wider area is characterised by a rolling landscape and densely wooded areas, which have been afforded the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The high boundary wall to the front of the appeal site provides a clear separation between the domestic curtilage and the surrounding sylvan setting. While there would be harm to the character and appearance of the host dwelling and to its immediate context, the extent of the harm would be contained, such that the surrounding landscape and scenic beauty would be unaffected. There would therefore be no conflict in relation to Policy RE5 and RE6, which seek to conserve the landscape character of the AONB and protect the distinctive landscape character in an AGLV. A lack of harm in this respect of the wider area and landscape, however, does not alter the material harm found in relation to the host dwelling.

Other considerations

21. I note that, until the appellant occupied Cutt Mill House, the grounds and water features were in a poor state. A landscape management plan, addressing the condition of the woodland and ensuring a varied habitat for wildlife may be an aspiration, and something that could be secured by condition. Noting the appellant's commitment to caring for the private mill pond and wider landholding, I attach moderate weight to this as a beneficial consideration. While larger domestic accommodation may be an incentive for the appellant to sustain the wider landholding, which they consider would better balance the domestic accommodation with the grounds, this carries very little weight in the balance against material harm to the Green Belt. The potential to link with the existing low-carbon heating system and the potential to install solar panels would help to reduce the impact of the extension on the environment; however, this is a neutral benefit that does not justify the extent of Green Belt harm.
22. While I acknowledge that the main dwelling is currently only accessible via steps, it has not been shown that there are no other alternatives that may improve access without the harm that would result from the appeal scheme. I note the appellant's desire for additional living space, enhanced facilities for their business separated from the main house; as well as the potential to reduce commuting journeys. Notwithstanding the advice given by an independent land agent in regards to creating a 'sustainable ensemble', these considerations relate to the personal circumstances of the appellant. I therefore attribute limited weight to them, bearing in mind that the particular circumstances of the occupants will change over time, whereas the development and the harm arising from it would be permanent.

Other matters

23. The appellant has submitted a Flood Risk Assessment² (FRA) in support of their application. The appeal site is indicated on the Environment Agency's (the EA) flood map as lying within Flood Zone 3, which is defined as high risk. However, the FRA indicates that the EA's mapping does not take account of the site-specific circumstances, including the water controls, which limit the flow of water into the mill leat that runs under the proposed extension, as well as the capacity of the channel. There are no main rivers within a 500m radius of the site, nor any records of historic flooding for the site or immediate surroundings. Considering the evidence before me it seems reasonable that the flood risk is less than assumed by the EA's mapping. For development within Flood Zone 2, the EA's standing advice states floor levels should be no lower than existing floor levels. The proposed finished floor level would be 48.00 mAOD, which is in excess of the 300mm external ground levels and would therefore satisfy this advice. I therefore consider the appeal proposal would not increase the risk of flooding. A lack of harm in this regard, however, does not alter my overall conclusion.

Conclusion

24. The Framework is clear, at paragraph 87, that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The appeal proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and, thus, harmful to it. Such harm should, therefore, be afforded substantial weight. I have concluded also that the proposal would

² RMA environmental Flood Risk Assessment Project Number RMA-C1613, July 2016

harm the openness of the Green Belt, and cause harm to the character and appearance of the host dwelling.

25. I have considered the case for very special circumstances put forward by the appellant and other merits cited in support of the proposal. I conclude, however, that taken together they do not clearly outweigh the harm that the scheme would cause. It follows, therefore, that the very special circumstances that are necessary to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt do not exist. I appreciate that, in relation to the personal circumstances of the appellant, my decision will come as a disappointment. However, I consider that it is a proportionate response and necessary to uphold the aims of planning policies based on protecting the Green Belt in the wider public interest.
26. Thus, for the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal scheme would fail to accord with the development plan and framework when read as a whole. As such, the appeal should be dismissed.

H Porter

INSPECTOR