
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 June 2017

by H Butcher BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 14 July 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/W/17/3169650

Land to the rear of 1 Firs Avenue, Bramley, Guildford, GU5 0ED

- 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 Anthony Robertson against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref WA/2016/1208, dated 8 June 2016, was refused by notice dated 15 August 2016.
 - The development proposed is a single bungalow to the end of the garden of 1 Firs Avenue. The site addresses Barton Road.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. I have used the site address on the appeal form in my banner heading above, as from the evidence before me this seems to be the most accurate.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies;
 - The effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, and;
 - Whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations and if so, would this amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Background

4. The appeal site has a planning history which includes two previous applications for planning permission for a dwelling at the appeal site, the most recent of which was dismissed at appeal (ref APP/R3650/W/16/3149175). I have considered the previous Inspector's findings. Although it is inevitable that
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matters will have moved on since that time issues such as character and appearance remain germane to the appeal before me.

Whether Inappropriate Development

5. The appeal site is in the Green Belt. As set out in Policy C1 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan 2002 (LP) the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate development. However, Policy RD1 of the LP does allow infill development in identified Rural Settlements such as Bramley providing that it is well-related to existing development.
6. Firs Avenue is a short cul-de-sac comprised of mainly two storey semi-detached properties with long rear gardens. The appeal site is at the end of the rear garden of 1 Firs Avenue where there is an existing access onto Barton Road. I agree with the previous Inspector's findings that the appeal site is largely viewed in the context of the dwellings to the west, the closest of which are along Firs Avenue. Consequently the siting of a bungalow to the rear of these, in an area of open undeveloped garden space, and fronting onto Barton Road, would appear completely out of character.
7. I acknowledge that Barton Road includes single storey dwellings similar to that proposed. However, these are on the opposite side of Barton Road and slightly removed from the appeal site being sited further to the north. Therefore, as noted above, they do not form the immediate context in which the proposed dwelling would be viewed. Consequently it would not relate well to the residential development around it.
8. Furthermore, the proposed dwelling would appear cramped. The rear elevation would be located in very close proximity to the rear boundary (approx 1m) meaning the garden would be mainly to the side rather than the rear as is the case with the majority of surrounding properties. It would also sit closer to Barton Road. The cramped and unusual layout would be perceivable from Barton Road and would further highlight its inappropriate location in relation to existing development.
9. Taking the above points together the proposed dwelling would not relate well to surrounding development. It would therefore conflict with Policies C1 and RD1 of the LP and as such would amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt.
10. There is discussion between the main parties about whether or not the Council can identify a five year supply of housing. In the Council's appeal statement, however, they have confirmed that they can. The appellant has not contested this at final comments stage and there is no substantive evidence before me to not accept the Council's final position. I therefore consider that the above policies can be considered up-to-date for the purposes of para 49 of the Framework and therefore carry great weight.

Openness

11. The Framework states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The proposed new dwelling would undoubtedly result in a loss of openness by the creation of a dwelling where there is currently not one. This would be tempered, however, by the fact that it would be located in an area which is surrounded by residential development, falling, as it does, within the identified rural

settlement of Bramley. Therefore, its impact on the overall openness of the Green Belt would be limited.

Character and appearance

12. As set out above the proposal would conflict with Policy RD1 in terms of how it relates to existing development. It follows, therefore, that it would be harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
13. The development would also result in the loss of a rear parking area for No 1 which would be relocated to the front of this property over a grass verge. This would be unlikely to significantly affect pedestrians as it would not encroach onto a footway. However, the loss of the grass verge here would be detrimental to the character and appearance of Firs Avenue as this, together with the other grass verges, gives the road a verdant and spacious feel.
14. Whilst there are one or two examples of verge parking along Firs Avenue, generally speaking the grass verges are intact. In any event, this does not justify further harm to the streetscene. I am not satisfied a condition in respect of parking would overcome my concerns above. I therefore find conflict with Policies D1 and D4 of the LP, which, generally speaking, seek high quality design which does not result in visual harm to a site's surroundings.

Conclusion

15. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The proposal would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it would not relate well to existing development. I have also found harm in terms of a loss of openness to the Green Belt. Substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. In addition to this I have found harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
16. The proposal would create an additional dwelling in a sustainable location and there would be economic benefits during construction and in the subsequent occupation of the dwelling. However, these benefits would be modest given the scale of the proposal.
17. Taking into account the other considerations outlined above these do not outweigh the substantial weight which must be given to Green Belt harm, as well as the harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area, sufficient to demonstrate very special circumstances.
18. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Hayley Butcher

INSPECTOR