
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 August 2017

by S M Holden BSc MSc CEng MICE TPP FCIHT MRTPI

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

Decision date: 12th September 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/D/17/3179572

Abbotts Pond Cottage, Tilford Road, Tilford, Farnham GU10 2DD

- 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 Smith against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref WA/17/0494, dated 8 July 2016, was refused by notice dated 16 June 2017.
 - The development proposed is extension and alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal in relation to the Green Belt as follows:
 - Whether the proposal is inappropriate development within the Green Belt for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and development plan policy;
 - The effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV);
 - If the development is inappropriate, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether the extension is inappropriate development within the Green Belt

3. Abbotts Pond Cottage is a two-storey, three bedroom, modestly-sized detached house set in a substantial plot. It is deeper than it is wide and includes a small single storey rear projection with a mono-pitched roof that provides a utility room, cloakroom and store. There is a small detached garage to the rear of the dwelling. The site lies within the Green Belt outside any defined settlement.

4. The Government's approach to protecting the Green Belt is set out in Section 9 of the Framework. It states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 89 of the Framework makes it clear that new buildings are inappropriate in the Green Belt. One of the few exceptions is an extension to an existing building, provided that it does not result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building. The assessment of whether or not a proposal is a disproportionate addition is made on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the specific circumstances of the site and the proposal.
5. Saved Policies C1 and RD2 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan (Local Plan) are consistent with the Framework's approach to inappropriate development and disproportionate extensions to existing buildings. The supporting text of Policy RD2 provides further guidance on the size of extensions, stating that those which increase floorspace by more than 40% are unlikely to be acceptable.
6. The original dwelling was constructed in the 1960s and has a floor area of 117.5 sq.m. The house has not been extended. However, the garage has been added, having originally been granted permission in 1983 and implemented following a subsequent approval in 1989, bringing the existing floorspace to a total of 135 sq.m. The proposal would increase the floorspace of the house to between 205 and 210.5 sq.m, depending on whether or not the area of the proposed open portico is included. The Council considers that this would represent a 79% increase over and above the original dwelling. However, the appellant suggests it would be closer to a 51% increase as he has included the floorspace of the garage, which would be demolished, in his estimate of the existing floorspace. Regardless of whether or not the floorspace of the garage is included in the assessment, the footprint of the building would be substantially increased. The proposal would add more floor area to the dwelling than the 40% limit suggested by the supporting text of Policy RD2.
7. The assessment of whether or not an extension is disproportionate is not only based on floorspace. It is also necessary to consider the height, scale and mass of the enlarged building. The proposed extension would be wider than the existing house and would project beyond its side walls. The provision of additional accommodation at first floor level would result in a bulkier building. The ridge of the extension would be very similar in height to that of the host property and its roof would add significantly to the mass and scale of the house. This combination of factors indicates that the extension would dominate, rather than appear subservient to, the host property. The proposal as a whole would therefore be a disproportionate extension when assessed against the form, scale and floor area of the original dwelling.
8. I conclude that the extension would be inappropriate development that is, by definition, harmful and therefore contrary to national and local policy to protect the Green Belt. This is a matter to which I attach substantial weight.

The effect of the extension on the openness of the Green Belt

9. Paragraph 79 of the Framework states that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Openness is the absence of development.

10. Even taking account of the area currently occupied by the garage, the overall footprint of development on the site would be increased as a result of the appeal proposal. In addition, the two-storey side extension would be both taller and more bulky than either the garage or the existing single-storey projection it would replace. This would result in a significant increase in the amount of development on the site and a loss of openness to the Green Belt.
11. I conclude that this loss of openness would be harmful to the Green Belt, contrary to national and local policy to protect it. However, as the scale of this loss would be small it is a matter which attracts only limited weight.

The effect of the extension on the character and appearance of the AGLV

12. The existing dwelling is a simple design, typical of its era and not of any particular architectural merit. Other dwellings in the area exhibit significant variation in their form and design. The property is set back from the road and slightly below it; most of the extension would be at the rear of the existing house. The scale of the proposal would change the character of the dwelling, but this would not adversely affect the appearance of the immediately surrounding area.
13. The site is within the Surrey Hills AONB and AGLV, areas which are designated for their landscape and scenic beauty. However, in the context of the surrounding street scene with its scattered dwellings, the proposal would not have any significant detrimental effect on these protected landscapes.
14. I conclude that the extension would not be harmful to the character and appearance of the area or the landscape and scenic beauty of the wider AONB and AGLV. In this respect the proposal would comply with Policy C3 of the Local Plan. However, the absence of harm is not a positive factor in the scheme's favour.

Other considerations

15. I acknowledge that the house requires improvement in view of its limited accommodation, dated interior and poor overall thermal efficiency. However, these existing shortcomings could be addressed in ways other than the construction of a large and disproportionate extension. Similarly, the inability to let the property successfully over a number of years is not a justification for permitting an unacceptable enlargement of the property. These considerations therefore carry little weight in my overall assessment.
16. My attention has been drawn to nearby dwellings where planning permission has been granted for extensions, firstly at Tiplers, Ref: WA/2014/2089 and secondly, Abbotsmere, Ref: WA/2016/1338. I understand that the Council was satisfied that the extension at Tiplers was below the 40% threshold and was therefore not disproportionate. Abbotsmere had been extended in the 1970s, above the recommended 40%. However, the recently approved scheme was assessed to be a modest extension that would improve the appearance of the building and therefore the Council considered very special circumstances existed. Consequently, neither of these schemes is directly comparable with the appeal proposal, which I have determined on its individual planning merits.
17. Following the refusal of a previous scheme, Ref: WA/2016/1563 the appellant has undertaken an additional bat survey. This has satisfied the Council that the proposal would not impact on bat roosts or foraging and commuting bats.

Mitigation measures are therefore not required to meet the requirements of the Habitats Regulations 2010. However, the absence of harm to protected species is not a positive factor in the scheme's favour.

The Green Belt balance

18. I have concluded that the proposed extension would be inappropriate development that would conflict with national and local policy to protect the Green Belt. It would also be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt, a matter of limited weight. The absence of harm to the AONB, AGLV and the character and appearance of the area is a neutral factor in the overall balance, as is the lack of harm to bats.
19. However, there are no other considerations in favour of the development that clearly outweigh the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the substantial weight that the Framework requires to be attached to such harm. The very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not, therefore, exist.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other relevant matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR