

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 October 2017

by Martin H Seddon BSc DipTP MPhil MRTPI

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

Decision date: 10 November 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/D/17/3178976

Highfields, Wonham Way, Gomshall, Guildford, Surrey, GU5 9NZ

- 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 B Buglear & Mrs J Butler against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref: 17/P/00607 was refused by notice dated 12 May 2017.
 - The development proposed is: Alterations and improvements including the erection of a single storey rear extension following the removal of the existing conservatory, provision of a new double garage and external alterations including the provision of a new bay window and chimney.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. At the time of the site visit some external alterations to the building and changes to ground levels in the front garden were in progress. Permission was granted in July 2017 (ref: 17/P/01145) for the conversion of the integral garage to habitable accommodation, provision of a new bay window on front elevation and erection of new chimney. In addition, a single storey rear extension following removal of the existing conservatory and enlargement of two second floor windows on the rear elevation serving a mezzanine.
3. Clearly part of the appeal proposal has been approved by the Council, with the main exception being the proposed double garage. In determining this appeal, I must have regard to the development proposed as a whole in order to assess it against national Green Belt policy and relevant development plan policies.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether the development would be inappropriate for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and development plan policy;
 - the effect on the purposes of the Green Belt and its openness;
 - 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 constitute the very special circumstances sufficient to justify allowing the appeal.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development in the Green Belt

5. Highfields is a part two/part three storey 4-bedroom detached dwelling located on the east side of Wonham Way. Wonham Way is an unmetalled road with houses primarily fronting its eastern side and within a rural setting. The property is located within the Green Belt, Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and an Area of Great Landscape Value. The National Planning Policy Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The extension of an existing building is not, however, inappropriate provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. There is no definition of 'disproportionate additions' in the Framework. The 'original building' is as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1948, as it was built originally.
6. The national policy advice in the Framework must be read together with the relevant development plan, which in this case includes the Guildford Borough Local Plan 2003. Saved Local Plan policy RE2 allows limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings providing it is in accordance with saved policy H9. Policy H9 indicates, amongst other criteria, that there will be a presumption against extensions to dwellings which result in disproportionate additions, taking into account the size of the original dwelling. These development plan policies are generally consistent with the Framework.
7. The Council advises that extensions to the original dwelling amount to around a 45% increase over the original floor area. The proposed development has been calculated by the Council to represent a cumulative increase in floor space of some 63% over the original, taking into consideration removal of the existing conservatory as part of the scheme. The appellants have not disputed this latter calculation, but contend that the proposed extensions and double garage would not appear disproportionate to the house.
8. Although the single storey rear extension would replace the existing conservatory, the proposed double garage would add a significant amount of floorspace and bulk. The proposal would therefore result in disproportionate additions and would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt. As already noted, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Effect on the purposes of the Green Belt and its openness

9. The Council has not raised any policy objections regarding the impact of the proposed development on the character of the area, the existing building, the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the Area of Great Landscape Value. Nevertheless, the proposed double garage, although set into the ground level, would be a significant addition within the front garden of the dwelling. The generally open front gardens and driveways are a characteristic of the dwellings along Wonham Way. The Framework indicates that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their permanence and openness. The proposed double garage would reduce the open character of the Green Belt because of its scale and siting forward of the dwelling. There would be some harm, albeit limited, to one of the purposes of Green Belt policy, which is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

Whether very special circumstances exist

10. The Framework advises that, when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. '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.
11. Regarding very special circumstances, the appellants advise that the existing garaging is inadequate for two reasons. The first relates to its internal dimensions, falling below the standards required to accommodate a family sized car. Secondly, Highfields is a 4-bedroom house as currently configured. They submit that the garage has been designed to be in keeping with the scale and character of the building, that it would not be intrusive in the rural landscape and not readily capable of conversion to self-contained residential accommodation. The appellants consider it is a reasonable expectation of the home owners to have a double garage to serve a dwelling of this size and contend that this requirement and other matters raised, should constitute the very special circumstances sufficient to justify the proposal.
12. The appellants also draw my attention to an appeal decision at 'Troon', Wonham Way in 2017 (ref: APP/Y3615/D/16/3167702) in which a two-storey rear extension, single storey side extension and elevational changes were allowed although they would result in a 61% increase in floor area. However, in that case the Inspector considered that the proposals would not constitute disproportionate additions and the development was therefore not deemed to be inappropriate in the Green Belt.
13. The matters raised by the appellants are acknowledged. The appeal proposal must be considered on its own merits in the context of national and local Green Belt policy. As found above, the proposal would represent a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building and would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
14. The harm from the proposal in respect of inappropriateness, harm to the openness of the Green Belt and limited harm to one of the purposes of the Green Belt from the proposed double garage clearly outweigh the matters put forward by the appellant as favouring the proposal. Very special circumstances do not exist which would justify allowing the proposal. It would conflict with the Framework, Local Plan policy RE2 and Local Plan policy H9.

Conclusion

15. I have taken all other matters raised into account. For the reasons given above the appeal is dismissed.

Martin H Seddon

INSPECTOR