



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 February 2020 by Alex O'Doherty LLB(Hons) MSc

Decision by K Taylor BSc (Hons) PGDip MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24th April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/D/19/3240053

27 Aston Lane, Aston RG9 3EJ

- 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 & Mrs A Huggins against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 191695, dated 24 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 12 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is a two storey side extension, single storey front and rear extensions and landscaping works to create parking spaces.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by an Appeal Planning Officer whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Procedural Matter

3. The application form stated the name of the applicant as, "Mr Bartus Lacey". However, the appellants' Agent has since confirmed that the applicants and the appellants are Mr & Mrs A Huggins. The appeal has been determined on this basis.

Main Issues

4. The appeal site is located within the Green Belt. Accordingly, the main issues in this appeal are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') and development plan policy;
 - the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area;
 - if the proposal would be inappropriate development, 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 it.

Reasons for the Recommendation

Whether Inappropriate Development

5. The Framework establishes that the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt is inappropriate. There are however a limited number of exceptions to this, as set out in paragraph 145 of the Framework. The one relevant to this appeal is (c): 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. "Original building" is defined in the Framework as a building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally.
6. Policy TB01 of the Wokingham Borough Development Plan Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (adopted 21 February 2014) ('Local Plan') is broadly consistent in this respect, establishing that the alteration or extension of a dwelling in the Green Belt shall be limited in scale. The policy's supporting text states that 'limited' means a cumulative increase of generally no more than a 35% increase in volume over and above the original dwelling.
7. The parties disagree on the exact measurements, but the appellants have stated that the proposed increase in volume over the 1948 benchmark is at most 39.25%. On the information before me, it is not possible to definitively determine if this figure is correct. Nevertheless, as it is similar to the figure provided for planning application F/2008/1716 (relating to 'Walkers Cottage', No 26 Aston Lane (No 26)), for a similar proposal, I have used the appellants' figure. This increase in volume is almost 5% more than that contemplated by the supporting text to Policy TB01.
8. The appellants have stated that planning permission F/2008/1716 involved a 46% increase in volume over the original dwelling, and that the proposed increase in volume is smaller than that permitted for similar adjoining properties to the north and south of the appeal property. Whilst that may be the case, and whilst the architectural aim to mirror the extensions at No 26 is recognised, the Framework and Policy TB01 require an assessment of the proposal against the original dwelling, which requires the proposal to be assessed on its own merits.
9. The 35% requirement in the supporting text to Policy TB01 is not absolute. However, in addition to breaching the 35% requirement, the proposal would extend the property to the side by a large margin, which would result in a highly visible increase in mass. As such, the proposal would result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building. The proposal therefore constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the Framework and Policy TB01 of the Local Plan. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt.

Openness

10. The Framework denotes openness as an essential characteristic of the Green Belt. The openness of the Green Belt has a spatial aspect as well as a visual aspect. 'Open' can mean the absence of development in spatial terms, and it follows that openness can be harmed even when development is not readily visible from the public realm.
11. The two storey side extension would introduce a large solid mass of built form. The single storey front and rear extensions would also add bulk to the appeal

property. Accordingly, the openness of the Green Belt would be reduced, both visually and spatially. I acknowledge that, due to various factors, including the topography of the site, the proposal's impact on the visual aspect of openness would be confined to the local area, but this does not alter my findings in this regard. Notwithstanding that the impact to openness would be both limited and localised, harm would result to the Green Belt.

Character and appearance

12. In addition to being located in the Green Belt, the appeal site is within an area designated as countryside, and also within a locally-designated Area of Special Character ('ASC'). The supporting text to Local Plan Policy TB26 makes clear that where development affecting an ASC is proposed, special regard should be given to the historical context, outbuildings, scale, form, massing and materials together with retaining key architectural features or detailing which contribute to the character of the building or the area.
13. The host property, a semi-detached dwelling, is of modest proportions, with a legible design which has largely retained its cottage character. Similarly, the traditional and largely restrained detailing of nearby properties contributes to the distinctly rural character of this part of Aston Lane. However, several nearby properties have already been extended, including the adjoining semi-detached dwelling at No 26 Aston Lane (No 26), and Nos 28 and 29 Aston Lane. Hence, the character of this part of Aston Lane is now largely defined by these residential extensions.
14. The proposed single storey front and rear extensions are of a limited scale, such that their effect on the character and appearance of the area would be minimal. However, it is recognised that the proposed two storey side extension would project across the width of the appeal site by a considerable margin, resulting in a mass of built form immediately adjacent to the road. Additionally, the combination of its height and width would contribute to the partial erosion of the cottage appearance of the host property.
15. Nevertheless, when seen in the context of the extended properties nearby, including the significant extensions at No 26, the proposed side extension would not appear out-of-place, nor would it unduly reduce the contribution that the host property makes to the character of the area. Overall, the 'bilateral symmetry' design rationale of the proposal, including the attempt to replicate the extensions at No 26, is well-suited to this part of Aston Lane.
16. I therefore conclude that the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the surrounding area. The proposal would be in accordance with Policy CP11 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document January 2010 ('Core Strategy') which states that proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where, in the case of residential extensions, proposals do not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building. The proposal complies with Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy which provides that planning permission will be granted for proposals that are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design.
17. The proposal conforms with Policy TB26 of the Local Plan which provides that planning permission will only be granted for proposals affecting Areas of

Special Character where they demonstrate that they retain and enhance the traditional, historical, local, and special character of the area and its setting.

Other Considerations

18. The Framework makes it clear at paragraph 144 that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. It establishes that 'very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
19. No 26 has been significantly altered, as have other nearby properties, including Nos 28 and 29 Aston Lane. The appellants have indicated that the proposal would involve a smaller increase in volume, over and above the original dwelling, when compared with No 26. Accordingly, I give moderate weight to the appellants' argument involving fairness, that like cases should be treated alike.
20. The proposal would architecturally balance the semi-detached pair. The proposal would also incorporate matching materials throughout. These considerations, which would serve to maintain the character and appearance of the area, are neutral factors, which do not weigh in favour of the proposal.
21. The appellants have mentioned that no evidence has been put forward to show that the site and its surroundings are heritage assets. This matter is not in dispute and carries neutral weight in my consideration of the proposal.

Balancing of Considerations and whether very special circumstances exist

22. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and further harm to the Green Belt would be caused as a result of loss of openness. These matters carry substantial weight. The proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the area, but as this is a neutral factor this does not weigh in favour of the proposal. Taken together, I find that the other considerations in this case do not clearly outweigh the harm that I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. Therefore, the proposal would not comply with the Green Belt aims of Policy TB01 of the Local Plan, or with Policy CP12 of the Core Strategy which provides that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Conclusion and Recommendation

23. Based on the above, and having regard to all matters raised, I recommend that the appeal should be dismissed.

Alex O'Doherty

APPEAL PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

24. I have considered all the submitted evidence and the Appeal Planning Officer's report and on that basis the appeal is dismissed.

K Taylor

INSPECTOR