
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 July 2020

by C Osgathorp BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 July 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/D/20/3248927

3 High Street, Sandridge AL4 9DG

- 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 Miss E Scales & Mr J Norman against the decision of St Albans City & District Council.
 - The application Ref 5/19/2741, dated 28 October 2019, was refused by notice dated 22 January 2020.
 - The development proposed is part two storey part first floor rear and single storey side extensions, new dormer facing courtyard and alteration to openings including moving front door to side elevation with front canopy.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The description of proposed development shown on the Council's decision notice and the appellant's appeal form is more precise than that shown on the planning application form. I have therefore used this description in the banner heading and determined the appeal on this basis.

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; and,
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt; and,
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the dwelling and the Conservation Area; and,
 - 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 the proposal.

Reasons

Inappropriate development

4. The appeal site is located within the Green Belt. The Framework in paragraph 143 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 145 sets out that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt, subject to a limited number of exceptions. This includes, at Paragraph 145 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 the building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally.
5. Saved Policy 1 of the City and District of St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994 (the LP) defines the extent of the Green Belt and states except for Green Belt settlements referred to in Policy 2, permission will not be given for development unless very special circumstances exist, or it is for specified purposes. These purposes do not include residential extensions, however Policy 13 states that extensions in the Green Belt may be permitted unless the scale or visual impact upon the building as originally constructed would create a building of significantly larger or different character. These policies pre-date the Framework and are not wholly consistent with it. As such, only limited weight can be given to LP Policies 1 and 13 and greater weight should be given to the requirements of the Framework.
6. Furthermore, the Council's Residential Extensions and Replacement Dwellings in the Green Belt Supplementary Planning Guidance 2004 (the SPG) is of some age and is related to Policy 13 of the LP. I therefore give this document limited weight.
7. The Framework does not define 'disproportionate additions', however the SPG provides some guidance in relation to the size of extensions that may be acceptable. In relation to side and rear extensions, Table 2 indicates that an increase in volume of between 90 to 180 cubic metres, or an increase in floorspace of between 20% to 40% may be acceptable. The SPG sets out that the criteria in paragraphs (ii) – (iiiv) will influence the size of extension that could be permitted. It states that the cumulative impact of previous and proposed extensions to the dwelling will be considered.
8. The officer's report states that the original building has been extended, consisting of a ground floor extension linking the dwelling and the barn, and a first floor extension. It says that the proposal, when combined with the previous extensions, would result in an increase in floorspace of approximately 40% and an increase in volume of around 170 cubic metres over and above the size of the original building. This puts the size of the proposal towards the top of the ranges set out in Table 2 of the SPG. Furthermore, the property has an extant planning permission for a single storey infill extension, which would further increase the floor area and volume of the additions above the size of the original building. I note the appellant's statement that they do not intend to implement this planning permission, however there is no mechanism before me to prevent the implementation of that planning permission.
9. I have had regard to the floorspace and volume figures provided by the appellant, however these relate to the increase above the size of the existing building rather than the original building. Given that the exception in paragraph 145 c) of the Framework refers to the original building, I prefer the figures

provided by the Council. Based on these cumulative floorspace and volume figures, the proposal would amount to a large increase in size over and above the original building.

10. I am mindful that the SPG indicates that the guidance figures are not rigid. An assessment of what constitutes a disproportionate addition generally goes beyond mathematical calculations. The matter also needs to be considered spatially, with reference to the massing, scale and general visual perception of the proposal. In this respect, the proposed rear extension, together with the existing rear gabled projection, would form a long ridgeline extending from the main dwelling close to the western boundary, which would appear bulky and fail to respect the scale and proportions of the original building. Moreover, whilst it would be set back from the front elevation, the gabled side extension would contribute to the excessive scale and bulk of the proposal. There would be limited screening of the proposed development, which would be visible from High Street and the countryside to the west. Therefore, the much greater massing when compared to the original building would result in a disproportionate addition.
11. The proposed development would therefore result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would be inappropriate development which is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. The proposal would therefore conflict with the Framework, saved Policies 1 and 13 of the LP, and guidance in the SPG. In accordance with the Framework, I give substantial weight to this harm.

Openness

12. The Framework states that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The openness of the Green Belt has both spatial and visual aspects.
13. The proposal would result in a large extension and part of it would occupy an area to the rear and side of the dwelling that is currently open and free of buildings. While the scale of the existing property is modest, the proposal would result in a significant increase in scale and bulk. There would be some limited screening provided by boundary hedging along High Street, however it would still be visible from High Street and the countryside to the west. Accordingly, there would be a clear perception that the building had been enlarged and the openness of the Green Belt eroded. The proposal would therefore cause moderate harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

Conservation Area

14. The appeal site is located within the Sandridge Conservation Area (the CA). Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. Paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that "*great weight should be given to the [designated heritage] asset's conservation*".
15. The CA includes statutorily listed buildings that are mainly clustered around Church End, and locally listed buildings along High Street. The appeal property is a cottage of modest scale with a pleasing appearance that reflects the rural

character of the area. It is a locally listed building which makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the CA. The building is designed with a tiled pitched roof which has a low eaves level. Small first floor front dormers are positioned on the front roof slope. The rear elevation features an existing gabled projection, which appears proportionate to the frontage. Whilst the main dwelling is joined to the original barn building at the rear by a small single storey extension, the separate form of the buildings can be readily seen.

16. I note the concerns in the officer's report that the proposal would not preserve or enhance the appearance of the existing property or the CA. To my mind, the excessive bulk of the proposed extension would fail to respect the modest scale and proportions of the existing dwelling. It would fill much of the space that exists to the rear of the property, and the amalgamation of the extension with the building at the rear would appear disjointed and mask the original relationship of the buildings. Furthermore, the featureless front wall of the side extension would create a bland appearance, and the large amount of glazing in the side gable would not reflect the modest openings and scale of the existing building.
17. Having regard to the above, and the visibility of the proposal in the CA, it would cause less than substantial harm to the character and appearance of the CA. In accordance with paragraph 196 of the Framework, any harm should be weighed against the public benefits. Great weight should be given to an asset's conservation. I note the appellant's statement that public benefits arise from the continued investment and care of the locally listed building. There would also be small short-term economic benefits from the construction of the development. However, this would not outweigh the harm that the proposal would cause to the CA. The proposal would therefore be contrary to the historic environment policies contained within the Framework.
18. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the dwelling and would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA. The proposal would conflict with the design and conservation aims of saved Policies 69, 72 and 85 of the LP, which, amongst other things, seek to ensure that extensions are compatible with buildings and preserve or enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas.

Other considerations and the Green Belt balance.

19. 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 proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would also cause moderate harm to its openness. The Framework makes clear in paragraph 144 that substantial weight should be given to such harm. Furthermore, the proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the character and appearance of the CA.
20. The appellant has drawn my attention to other proposals for extensions, which have been approved by the Council. Nevertheless, I am required to determine the appeal scheme on its own individual merits and I am not bound by other decisions made by the Council.

21. The proposal would provide small economic benefits in respect of the construction of the development and the maintenance of the locally listed building.
22. The other considerations identified in support of the scheme do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. The proposal is therefore contrary to the Framework and saved Policies 1 and 13 of the LP which seek to protect the Green Belt.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Osgathorp

INSPECTOR