



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 September 2020

by Elizabeth Pleasant BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12th October 2020.

Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/D/20/3245523

22 Reynards Road, Welwyn AL6 9TP

- 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 David Butt against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2019/2238/HOUSE, dated 9 September 2019, was refused by a notice dated 4 November 2019.
 - The development proposed is erection of single storey mono-pitch roofed side extension following demolition of existing garage. Raising of roof height to rear projection and erection of a two-storey rear extension to create dual pitched roof following removal of existing dormer window. Insertion of two front dormers and erection of front porch.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this case are:
 - Whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and, if so, the effect on openness;
 - The effect on the character and appearance of the host property; and
 - If it 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 required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Inappropriate development

3. The appeal proposal is for extensions and alterations to a detached bungalow which is located within the Green Belt. Saved Policy RA3 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, 2005 (LP) advises that permission for extensions to existing dwellings within the Green Belt will be allowed where: (i) The proposal would not individually or when considered with existing or approved extensions to the original dwelling, result in a disproportionate increase in the size of the dwelling; and (ii) it would not have an adverse visual impact (in terms of its prominence, size, bulk and design on the character, appearance and pattern of development of the surrounding countryside.

4. Paragraph 145 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt subject to a number of exceptions. The extension or alteration of a building is included in those exceptions, provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. Policy RA3 (i) of the LP is consistent with the Framework in this regard.
5. The existing dwelling is a bungalow with attached garage. It has been previously extended at single storey level to the rear and with rooms in the roof formed by a small rear dormer and roof lights within the front roof slope. The proposed development would replace the garage with a single storey lean-to at the side of the dwelling and extend to two-storey level across almost the whole width of the dwelling's rear elevation in the form of a double gable. Two front dormers and a porch would also be added. Overall, the appellant's drawing¹ indicates a 30% increase in the footprint of the dwelling and a 43% increase in its overall floor area.
6. Having regard to the proposed demolition of the original garage, the increase in the footprint of the original bungalow by 30% would not in itself be disproportionate. However, the increase in floor space at first floor level, at 66%, gives rise to a significant change in the overall scale and proportions of the original dwelling. Whilst I appreciate that the ridge height of the two-storey rear extension has been reduced from the previous scheme², by reason of its overall depth, width and form the two storey rear additions remain disproportionate to the original dwelling. I am in no doubt that the development proposed would be seen as a substantial increase in the mass and bulk of the size and form of the original dwelling and would be a disproportionate addition to the building. As such, it would comprise inappropriate development and would conflict with Saved Policy RA3 (i) of the LP.

Openness

7. Paragraph 133 of the Framework states that a fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and the essential characteristics of the Green Belt are their openness and permanence.
8. The proposal would see an increase in the footprint of the dwelling and would extend over land which is currently undeveloped. It would therefore result in some loss of openness. Furthermore, the proposal would extend to first floor level and its bulk and form would further reduce openness.
9. I conclude that the proposed development would reduce the openness of the Green Belt, albeit only to a small extent, and there would be conflict with the Framework as set out above.

Character and appearance

10. The original bungalow has a simple form, it is set back from the road and is situated in a large plot. The existing extensions respond to that simplicity. They are subservient in scale and have been designed in a manner which do not detract from the building's original character and form.

¹ Drawing Ref 902 Rev A, Proposed Floor Plans, Sept 2019.

² APP/C1950/D/19/3235591

11. In this case, the proposed design of the front dormer windows responds to the building's original form, and consequently, when viewed from the street the proposal would not have a harmful effect on the visual characteristics of the street scene. The positioning of the dwelling, which is set back from the road and in a location where the individual design characteristics of dwellings on Reynards Road differ considerably, reinforces that view. However, the overall scale and design of the rear two-storey addition, in particular due to its eaves height, would result in an extension which overwhelms the rear elevation of the dwelling to the extent that its original form, when viewed from the rear garden and neighbouring properties, would no longer be discernible. Consequently, the rear extension would appear incongruous and have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the host property.
12. I conclude that the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the host property. It would conflict with the development plan and in particular with Saved Policies D1 and D2 of the LP and the Council's adopted Supplementary Design Guidance 2005, which advise that extensions to residential properties should be designed to complement and reflect the design and character of the dwelling and be subordinate in scale.

Other considerations

13. I have found that the proposal comprises inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. I have also found that the development would reduce the openness of the Green Belt and harm the character and appearance of the host property. Very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development 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.
14. I have had regard to the appendices attached to the Planning Application Justification Statement which illustrates how the property could be extended using permitted development rights. However, those works would be predominantly single storey and would therefore appear subservient to the original dwelling. In addition, the rear dormer, although large, would also be contained within the existing rear roof slope and would not therefore alter the character or form of the original dwelling.
15. I have also had regard to the details of the Lawful Development Certificate (LDC) which has been granted for 34 Reynards Road. However, that LDC does not relate to the appeal premises, and whilst the original properties appear to be quite similar, they are not identical. In the absence of an LDC for the appeal property, I cannot not be certain that the same extension would be permitted development at the appeal site. Furthermore, the two-storey extension for which the LDC at No 34 has been granted, maintains the same the eaves height as the original dwelling and is also responds its original roof form. Consequently, I am not convinced that the appeal scheme would be equally or less harmful, or indeed more characterful than could be achieved under permitted development. I therefore give this consideration limited weight.
16. I appreciate the support that the development has from neighbouring residents and recognise that the area is characterised by a variety of different house styles. However, these considerations do not add any positive weight in the planning balance.

Conclusion

17. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. I have identified that the proposal would be inappropriate development and to a limited extent would harm the openness of the Green Belt. I have also found that it would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the host property. The other considerations cited in support of the proposal only carry limited weight and taken together do not outweigh the harm identified to the Green Belt. There are no very special circumstances to justify the proposed development.
18. For the reasons given above and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Elizabeth Pleasant

INSPECTOR