



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 September 2020

by Adrian Hunter BA(Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14th October 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/W/20/3251299

Dovers, Barrs Lane, Knaphill, Surrey GU21 2JN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Robin Barrett against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PLAN/2020/0167, dated 4 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 21 April 2020.
 - The development proposed is outline application for the erection of a detached single storey dwelling on land adjacent to Dovers Cottage and erection of a single storey extension and external alterations to Dovers Cottage following demolition of parts of dwelling (Matters of appearance and landscaping reserved).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. In my formal decision I have used the description of development as it appears on the Decision Notice, in preference to how it appears on the application form, because it more accurately reflects the proposals.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - Whether the proposed development is inappropriate development for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and development plan policy;
 - The effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the area; and
 - If it is 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 development.

Reasons

Whether the proposal is inappropriate development

4. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Inappropriate development is, by

- definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
5. Within the Green Belt, Policy CS6 of the Woking Core Strategy (CS) 2012 identifies that strict control applies to inappropriate development, as defined by the Framework.
 6. The Framework identifies that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt, other than in respect of a limited range of specified exceptions. Paragraph 145(g) of the Framework identifies that one of the exceptions is limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.
 7. The new dwelling and the proposed changes to the host dwelling would create two single storey buildings. However, the introduction of a new property, in combination with the redevelopment of the host dwelling, would increase the amount of built development on the appeal site, thereby reducing the openness. In addition, the overall presence of the development, in relation to the length of the site would be greater, which would increase the spatial loss of openness. The proposal would therefore have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt when compared with the existing situation. This weighs against the proposal. Furthermore, no evidence has been put to me to demonstrate that the proposed new dwelling would contribute to meeting the identified affordable housing need within the area.
 8. It has not been put to me that the appeal scheme would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt for any other reason, and I have not found any reason to believe that it would meet any of the other criteria of paragraph 145 of the Framework. On that basis, therefore, when assessed against relevant sections of the Framework and the adopted Policies in the Local Plan, the proposed development would represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
 9. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. As I have assessed above, the proposal would therefore have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Whilst this loss of openness may not be considerable, in accordance with paragraph 144 of the Framework, substantial weight must be given to this harm to the Green Belt.

Character and appearance

10. The surrounding area is predominately residential, with neighbouring dwellings being large, detached properties, set within spacious plots. The surrounding area is verdant in appearance, which, when combined with the relatively low density of surrounding development, gives the area a semi-rural character.
11. In contrast to surrounding properties, the proposed new dwelling would sit within a smaller plot and consequently, there would be less generous spacing

between the proposed dwelling and the re-designed host dwelling. This would introduce a form of development that would fail to respect the context, layout and character of the surrounding area. It would result in a cramped appearance. As a result, the proposal would introduce a pattern of development which would be out of keeping and harmful to the character and appearance of the area. Whilst the proposal to amend the host property would reduce the visual presence of the existing dwelling, this benefit does not outweigh the identified harm that would arise from the development of a new dwelling.

12. For the above reasons, I therefore conclude that the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area and, in this respect, would be contrary to Policies CS21, CS24 of the CS and Policy DM10 of the Woking Development Management Policies (DM) 2016 and the Framework. These Policies, amongst other things, seek to ensure that new development respects and enhances the character of the area and that plot sizes should not be substantially below those in the prevailing area.

Green Belt balance

13. The Framework advises that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. When assessed against the Framework and the relevant development plan policies, the proposal would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt and would require very special circumstances to justify the harm caused by inappropriateness. Harm would also be caused to the openness of the Green Belt.
14. Therefore, the proposal would amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and cause harm to the openness. It would therefore be contrary to Policy CS6 of the CS and Section 13 of the Framework that, amongst other things, share a common objective of protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development.
15. I note the comments that have been submitted in support of the appeal, including the letters of support from neighbouring residents. However, given the national importance to protecting the Green Belt, this support, does not clearly outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Other Matters

16. The site is located within the 5 km buffer zone of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. Regulation 63(1) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 indicates the requirement for an Appropriate Assessment is only necessary where the competent authority is minded to give consent for the proposal. Thus, given my overall conclusion on the main issues it is not necessary for me to consider this matter in any further detail.

Conclusion

17. For all of the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Adrian Hunter

INSPECTOR