
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 October 2020

by John D Allan BA(Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5 November 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/D/20/3253279

Walnut Cottage, Star Hill, Churt, Farnham, GU10 2HR

- 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 Duke against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref WA/2019/1980, dated 5 November 2019, was refused by notice dated 6 March 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as '*Extensions and Alterations to Walnut Cottage*'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. There is no dispute between the parties that the proposed extensions to Walnut Cottage would amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and relevant development plan policies. I have no reason to disagree. The main issues are therefore:
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - 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

3. Paragraph 143 of the Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Policy RE2 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 1 (LP Part 1), adopted in 2018, states that the Metropolitan Green Belt will be protected against inappropriate development in accordance with national policy. Saved Policy RD2 of the Waverley Borough Council Local Plan 2002 (LP 2002) deals with the extension of dwellings within the countryside, including the Green Belt, and carries with it an equivalent presumption against disproportionate

additions over and above the size of an original dwelling. The undisputed fact that the proposal would amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purpose of the Framework and development plan policy means that, by definition, this would be harmful to the Green Belt and I attach substantial weight to this harm.

The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt

4. The Framework states that an essential characteristic of Green Belts is their openness and that a fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land within them permanently open.
5. Planning permission was granted in October 2019 under Ref WA/2019/1475 for the erection of extensions and alterations to the appeal property. These amounted to ground floor, single-storey extensions. That planning permission remains extant. The appeal proposal replicates the previously permitted ground floor extensions but seeks to include a first-floor extension to the side over an existing dining room area.
6. The first-floor extension would add noticeable bulk to the appearance of the dwelling by projecting the building sideways at first floor level. Although the proposal would not expand the footprint of the existing building, the addition of some built form at this level, where currently there is a void, would result in some loss of openness to the Green Belt. Although the degree of this loss would be minimal, this must be regarded as some additional harm, even if only slight, to add to the harm by reason of the inappropriateness of the proposed extensions to the dwelling.
7. Part of the appeal proposal involves demolition of four timber outbuildings within the curtilage of the appeal site. These are all single-storey and include an array of ancillary garden buildings. According to the appellants, the cumulative floor area of these add up to 29.5sqm. I found these buildings to be fairly inconspicuous in their setting, each with various degrees of visual prominence. Nevertheless, I accept that the removal of these buildings would have some impact upon the openness of the Green Belt by reverting this part of the appeal site to open land.

The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area

8. Whilst accepting that the first floor extension would be subordinate in scale to the main dwelling and that it would not be prominent when viewed from the public domain, the Council is concerned that the proposal would unbalance the appearance of the building, with Walnut Cottage being one half of a semi-detached pair. However, during my visit I was unable to identify any important sense of balance or symmetry to the appearance of the building. The appellant has pointed out that the building was a former chapel having been subdivided front and rear into two dwellings. Walnut Cottage is to the rear with the attached Chapel Cottage fronting Star Hill. Whilst the extensions would impact the profile of the building when viewed from the side, I am not persuaded that it would alter the character of the building in any adverse manner.
9. The extensions would be well-considered and finished with appropriately matching materials and detailing. As such, I find no conflict with LP Part 1 Policy TD1 or saved Policies D1, D4 or RD2 of the LP 2002 insofar as they deal

specifically with design quality and the need for development to respect its surroundings.

Whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations

10. The extant permission was granted on the basis that very special circumstances existed. In other words, the weight that was attributed to other considerations outweighed the harm by reason of the development being inappropriate in the Green Belt and other identified harms. I accept that the implementation of this extant planning permission would represent a realistic 'fallback position' for the appellants. However, the appeal proposal is for a materially different development that would literally build upon the consented scheme by adding further floorspace and bulk to the building.
11. The appellants argue that the appeal proposal would be beneficial as it would serve to consolidate development on the site whereas the 'fallback position' would have a greater harmful impact upon the openness of the Green Belt given that the outbuildings would remain in situ.
12. When measured purely in terms of floor area, there would be a net reduction on the site when comparing the appeal proposal with the extant permission. However, this does not automatically equate to a net benefit to the openness of the Green Belt. It is necessary to consider the impact that is wrought by the changes. I have found that there would be some impact upon the openness of the Green Belt through the removal of these buildings, but in my assessment, due to the diminutive scale and unobtrusive visual presence of each, I find the benefit to be only slight. Accordingly, the combination of the fallback position and the benefits from removing the outbuildings carries some but not a significant amount of weight in favour of the appeal.
13. On the other hand, the inappropriateness of the development in the Green Belt and the loss of openness from the first-floor addition combine to amount to substantial weight against the proposal. When weighed in the balance the potential harm to the Green Belt would not be clearly outweighed by other considerations. The very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.

Conclusions

14. Notwithstanding my findings as they relate to the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, for the reasons given I have found that there would be harm to the Green Belt and that the weight attributed to this harm would not be outweighed by other considerations. The very special circumstances needed to justify the development do not exist. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

John D Allan

INSPECTOR