
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 December 2020

by Jillian Rann BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 December 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/D/20/3258070

5 Cambridge Road, Babraham CB22 3AF

- 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 Mrs Louise Traynier against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/01241/HFUL, dated 11 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 1 July 2020.
 - The development proposed is construction of 2 storey rear extension over existing flat roof plus other internal and external alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. 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;
 - the effect on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the appeal site and its surroundings; and
 - whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development

3. The Framework regards the construction of new buildings as inappropriate development in the Green Belt. One exception is 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. Policies S/4 and H/13 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (the Local Plan) state that new development in the Green Belt will only be approved in accordance with Green Belt Policy in the Framework and that extensions to dwellings will be permitted in the Green Belt if they would not result in a disproportionate addition to the original dwelling.

4. The appeal relates to a semi-detached bungalow which has previously been extended. The submissions indicate that those previous extensions were permitted in 1985 and 1995. The Glossary at Annex 2 of the Framework clearly defines the original building as 'a building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally'. It is not clear from the submissions exactly when the appeal building was built. However, in either event, it is clear that those previous extensions do not form part of the original building as it is defined in the Framework, notwithstanding the time which has passed since their construction. I have considered the appeal accordingly, taking those previous additions into account as existing extensions, not as part of the original building.
5. The Council states that taken cumulatively with those existing extensions, the extensions now proposed would result in an increase of over 60% in floor area over and above that of the original building. In the absence of any substantive evidence to the contrary, I am content to rely on that figure.
6. The size of the proposed extensions in isolation may be somewhat limited. However, when taken together with those pre-existing extensions, the proposed extensions would represent a significant increase in size relative to that of the original building. Consequently, the development would result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. It would therefore be inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and which should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Effect on openness

7. The Framework states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Policy NH/8 of the Local Plan states that development proposals in the Green Belt must be located and designed so that they do not have an adverse effect on the openness of the Green Belt.
8. Whilst of relatively limited size in themselves, the proposed extensions would nonetheless result in additional volume and massing at ground floor and first floor level. The ground floor extension would also encroach further into undeveloped garden area. The extensions would therefore result in built form where none exists presently.
9. With the exception of the small front and side dormers, the extensions would be located to the rear of the building. Views of them would therefore be limited from public vantage points. However, the additional volume and massing of the rear extensions, particularly to the first floor, would nonetheless be visible from neighbouring property and from the shared access track which runs to the side and rear of the site and its neighbour.
10. The additional built form proposed would therefore cause harm to the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt. The degree of harm to openness would be limited. However, the Framework nonetheless requires that substantial weight is given to that harm to the Green Belt.

Character and appearance

11. The proposed extensions would add further bulk and massing to the rear of the building, which has already been the subject of significant additions to the rear.
12. The first floor extension would be set down from the ridge line of the front part of the appeal building. However, it would project some distance to the rear and would thus significantly increase the width, bulk and massing of the existing first floor rear projection. The resulting, enlarged first floor rear projection would represent a disproportionately large and unduly dominant feature that would overwhelm and detract from the relatively modest proportions and predominantly single storey appearance of the existing building. Although it would be to the rear, the bulk and massing of the first floor extension and its disproportionate scale and appearance in relation to the appeal building would be visible from neighbouring properties and from the shared access route to the side and rear.
13. The ground floor extension would also add to the bulk and massing of the existing rear extensions. However, given its relatively limited footprint and its single storey height, it would not appear unduly dominant or detract further from the character or appearance of the building.
14. The proposed dormers would be small in scale and similar to existing dormers on the appeal building and the adjoining property. Therefore, they would not appear discordant or out of character with the existing building.
15. However, for the reasons given, I conclude that the first floor extension would have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the appeal site and its surroundings. It would therefore conflict with Policies HQ/1 and H/13 of the Local Plan. Amongst other things those policies require development to be compatible with its location and state that extensions to dwellings in the countryside will be permitted where they are in scale with the existing dwelling.

Other considerations

16. It has been suggested that the existing detached garage and store could be demolished as a means of offsetting the additional floor area and volume of the proposed extensions. However, even if the demolition of the garage would result in a reduction in built form and benefits to openness within the site as a whole, I would have no means of securing such a benefit with certainty. A condition requiring the building's removal would only come into effect upon the implementation of any planning permission and would not prevent the exercising of permitted development rights for other structures to be built in the meantime. In the absence of any indication as to how that reduction in built form and any associated benefits to openness might otherwise be secured, I afford limited weight to any suggested benefits in that regard.
17. I have had regard to comparisons drawn to existing extensions to the neighbouring property and to the size of other nearby dwellings. However, I have considered the proposal before me on its own planning merits. The size of other nearby buildings and the existence of extensions to other nearby properties does not alter my conclusion that the cumulative effect of the existing and proposed extensions would result in disproportionate additions to the original building in this particular case.

18. Matters relating to the Council's handling of the application and the time taken for its determination do not alter my conclusions above, which are based on the planning merits of the case.

Green Belt Balance

19. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. Therefore, substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering any proposal for development within it. In this case, I have found harm to the Green Belt by reason of the proposed development's inappropriateness, to the openness of the Green Belt, and to character and appearance. Balanced against that are the other considerations discussed above. However, for the reasons given those do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and other identified harm.
20. Therefore, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. Consequently, I conclude that the development would conflict with the Green Belt protection aims in Policies S/4, NH/8 and H/13 of the Local Plan and with those of the Framework.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Jillian Rann
INSPECTOR