
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 December 2020

by R C Shrimplin MA(Cantab) DipArch RIBA FRTPI FCI Arb MCIL

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 January 2021

Appeal Reference: APP/J1535/D/20/3261150

'Wordsworth House', Pynest Green Lane, Waltham Abbey EN9 3QL

- 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 J Crosby against the decision of Epping Forest District Council.
 - The application (reference PL/EPF/1440/20, dated 8 July 2020) was refused by notice dated 28 August 2020.
 - The development proposed is described in the application form as "partially infill courtyard to create additional living space at first floor level".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

2. The first main issue to be determined in this appeal is whether the proposal is "inappropriate development" in terms of Green Belt policies. If so, it is necessary to consider whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness together with any other harm that might be caused (including the effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it) would be clearly outweighed by other considerations.
3. If the proposed development is to be categorised as "not inappropriate", it is nonetheless necessary, in this case, to consider the impact of the proposed development on the host building and its surroundings.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located in an area of open countryside, to the south of the M25 near Waltham Abbey, close to Junction 26. It forms part of a group of buildings that were once related to a country house that has since been demolished. The building complex included the coach house and stable block that originally served the mansion and it now stands in a broad area of parkland that is set with woodland and individual mature trees. It is very secluded and is reached by means of a long private drive from Pynest Green Lane, which is itself a narrow, winding country lane.

5. There are other buildings in the group, but the original coach house and stables were designed around a series of courtyards, in a range of buildings that has been subdivided and converted to create two substantial and impressive homes ('Wordsworth House' and 'Tennyson House'), though the buildings have also been modified subsequently.
6. 'Wordsworth House' is a large and complex property, with extensive grounds of its own. It now has a clearly residential character and its original function is obscured by the changes that have taken place and by its new use. Nevertheless, the building makes an impressive feature in the landscape and it includes a tall tower that overlooks the building group and creates a landmark in itself. This house has been created around two courtyards, one of which is entirely enclosed by the living accommodation, while the other has a high brick wall on two sides (incorporating a gate), with buildings on the other two sides that permit a way through to the internal courtyard.
7. It is now proposed that an extension should be built at first floor level over the majority of the walled courtyard. The extension would provide covered space for parking cars at ground floor level, with a very large new bedroom on the first floor, making use of part of the existing roof structure to create a dressing room, an en-suite bathroom and an additional bedroom.
8. The appeal site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt, where development is strictly controlled. Policy GB2A of the 'Epping Forest District Local Plan' (adopted in January 1998) is a broad planning policy that is intended to prevent development in the Green Belt except in certain limited cases. These exceptions include "a limited extension to an existing dwelling", subject to certain provisos. In such cases, it is necessary to consider the impact of proposed building on the openness of the Green Belt and whether the proposed extension would be "excessive in size".
9. Policy DM4 of the emerging 'Epping Forest District Local Plan' (Submission Version 2017) takes forward the Green Belt Policy and is aimed at restricting extensions that would result in "disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building".
10. The 'National Planning Policy Framework', published in 2019, is more up to date than the formally adopted 'Local Plan' and it also emphasises the strict controls on development that apply in Green Belts. It is made clear that the construction of new buildings is "inappropriate in the Green Belt" and not normally acceptable there. Paragraph 145 identifies some limited exceptions to this, however, including "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".
11. Policy HC13A of the 'Epping Forest District Local Plan' refers to the Council's "list of buildings of local architectural or historic importance" and makes clear the aim of protecting such buildings. Policy DM7 of the emerging 'Epping Forest District Local Plan' reflects this approach.
12. The 'National Planning Policy Framework' also emphasises the importance of conserving and enhancing the historic environment (especially at Section 16), though it points out the special considerations that apply to designated heritage assets, deriving from legislation. In this case, the appeal building is

- "locally listed" but is not a "designated heritage asset" as defined in the Glossary (Annex 2) to the 'National Planning Policy Framework'. Of course, the 'National Planning Policy Framework' also emphasises the importance of good design as a general objective (notably at Section 12), while making effective use of land and encouraging economic activity.
13. Other parts of the building group have been extended in the past but, in this case, the proposed extension would relate to the existing building at 'Wordsworth House', a large rambling dwelling. The project would create a new structure over much of the existing walled courtyard, with a new first floor of habitable accommodation, within the area of the courtyard. The existing roof structure would be extended, with pitched roofs surrounding a flat roofed area that would merge within the existing elevations.
 14. In terms of Green Belt Policy, the new extension would not have a material effect on the openness of the Green Belt and would have no implications for the purposes of including the land within it. The extension would not be "disproportionate", as envisaged by the 'National Planning Policy Framework' and reflected in the emerging 'Epping Forest District Local Plan'. I have formed the opinion that these policy documents are the most relevant in these circumstances and that the proposed extension would satisfy the criteria expressed in them. Hence, the proposals would not be "inappropriate" in the context of Green Belt Policy.
 15. Nevertheless, it is necessary, in this case, to consider the impact of the proposed development on the host building and its surroundings, bearing in mind the status of 'Wordsworth House' as a locally listed building.
 16. In spite of the changes that have taken place, the building group still represents an important feature in the countryside that is dominated, in more distant views, by the central tower. The original layout of the coach house and stables building is still legible in the structure, arranged around a series of courtyards. Nevertheless, the nature of these buildings has been entirely changed and the internal layout of 'Wordsworth House' is residential in character and in appearance. Thus, the main architectural and historic significance of the building now lies in its general layout and character, together with its appearance in the landscape.
 17. In detail, the appearance of the proposed first floor extension would be in keeping with the original building, merging with the existing roof forms and replicating their style and materials. On the other hand, the new structure would not relate well to the existing building, architecturally, being inset from the high courtyard wall, in a structurally illogical form that would involve the placing of a main structural column within the open space, thus effectively subdividing the courtyard.
 18. In this way, the walled courtyard would be greatly changed, while most of the area would be covered over by the new extension, to provide a space for cars to be kept. The device of creating a flat roofed area above the new bedroom, surrounded by pitched roofs to imitate the existing design, would not overcome the essential lack of harmony with the logic of the original layout and the courtyard feature would be obscured. The architectural composition would be

- undermined and, in consequence, the historic and architectural qualities of the building would be considerably eroded, especially in regard to its layout.
19. In the wider setting, there is no doubt scope for some change to the external appearance of the building, provided that any extension were to be proportionate bearing in mind the scale of the existing building at 'Wordsworth House'. On the other hand, the scheme that has been advanced in this appeal would be awkward and ungainly in relation to the existing construction and would spoil its essential architectural character, as well as undermining its historic significance.
 20. The stricter constraints that apply to a building that is on the statutory list of "building of special architectural or historic interest" do not apply in this case but, even so, the project would have a clearly harmful effect on the host building and its surroundings, to the extent that it ought not to be allowed.
 21. Evidently, the proposed development would make a useful addition to the existing house. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the harm that would be done to the architectural and historic qualities of the locally listed building outweigh the benefits of the project. Hence, I have concluded that the scheme before me would conflict with both national and local planning policies (including the Development Plan) and that it ought not to be allowed. Although I have considered all the matters that have been raised in the representations, I have found nothing to cause me to alter my decision.

Roger C Shrimplin

INSPECTOR