

Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 22 December 2020

by S Edwards MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 09 February 2021

Appeal A Ref: APP/X0360/W/20/3259260

Spring Cottage, Crazies Hill, Crazies Hill, Wargrave RG10 8LU

- 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 John Murdoch against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 200960, dated 27 April 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 June 2020.
 - The development proposed is single storey side extension.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/X0360/Y/20/3259272

Spring Cottage, Crazies Hill, Crazies Hill, Wargrave RG10 8LU

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr John Murdoch against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 200961, dated 27 April 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 June 2020.
 - The works proposed are single storey side extension.
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Decisions

1. Appeal A is dismissed.
2. Appeal B is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

3. The proposed development and works affect a listed building, and I have therefore had special regard to sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Both appeals relate to the same site and raise similar issues, and I shall therefore consider them in a single document, in the interests of brevity.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - Whether the proposal would constitute 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 and the countryside;

- Whether the proposal would preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed buildings known as Spring Cottage and Thatch Cottage or their settings; and
- If found to be inappropriate development, 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 necessary to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

5. The appeal site comprises a Grade II listed property located within the Green Belt. The Framework sets out that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt, and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 145 permits 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.
6. Policy TB01 of the Wokingham Borough Development Plan – Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan¹ (LP) is broadly consistent with the Framework, as it notably requires extensions over and above the size of the original building(s) to be limited in scale. The supporting text to Policy TB01 defines 'limited' as 'a cumulative increase of generally no more than a 35% increase in volume over and above the original dwelling'. Additionally, Policy CP11 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy² (CS) seeks to ensure that residential extensions do not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
7. In isolation, the size of the proposed extension would appear relatively modest. As the appeal property has been subject to a number of extensions since it was constructed, there is no doubt that the volume of the original building has already been increased significantly. On this basis, despite the slight reduction to the volume of the property as part of the works carried out around 2011, the proposal would, cumulatively with previous extensions, result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building.
8. For the foregoing reasons, the appeal proposal would amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and would therefore not accord with CS Policies CP11 and CP12, LP Policy TB01, paragraph 143 of the Framework and the exception outlined in paragraph 145c) of the Framework.

Openness and countryside

9. As set out in paragraph 133 of the Framework, a fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The Framework also identifies openness as one of the essential characteristics of the Green Belt.
10. The appeal site lies within a small hamlet predominantly characterised by linear development, which is also designated as an Area of Special Character. Spring Cottage is visible within the street scene, and so would the proposed extension. Although the scale of the proposal would remain modest and the loss of

¹ February 2014.

² Adopted 29 January 2010.

openness resulting from the new addition would not be great in itself, it would nevertheless add to the bulk of the property, both visually and spatially. The proposed development would have a moderate negative effect on openness, which adds to the harm by reason of inappropriateness.

11. The increased bulk resulting from the proposal would, together with previous extensions, constitute a disproportionate addition to the historic property, which would harmfully erode the rural character of the area. The effect would be limited given the level of screening afforded by the existing hedge, but it would nevertheless remain visible, and cause some harm to the countryside.
12. Given the above, the appeal scheme would result in an inappropriate increase in the scale, form and footprint of the original building, which would have a detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the countryside. It would therefore not accord with the design aims and requirements of CS Policies CP3 and CP11, but also LP Policy TB01. Additionally, the proposal would fail to accord with LP Policy TB26, which focuses on developments affecting Areas of Special Character.

Heritage

13. Spring Cottage forms a pair of semi-detached properties with Thatch Cottage. The properties, which date from the early 19th century, are jointly listed at Grade II. The significance of these designated heritage assets resides primarily in their architectural and historic interest as traditional cottages. They are characterised by their compact form and mirrored appearance, to which several of their historic features contribute, including roughcast cob walls, an imposing hipped thatched roof and a prominent brick chimney.
14. Over time, the appeal property has been subject to a number of alterations. In 2011, an earlier single storey side extension with open porch was replaced with a wider and taller addition, which was however set back further from the dwelling's front elevation, thus resulting, in effect, in the loss of an open porch feature. This has enabled one to better appreciate the historic compact form of this pair of thatched cottages.
15. The proposed development and works seek to bring the side extension forward, in line with the buttress of the previous open porch which has been retained in situ as part of the previous scheme. The appeal scheme would unduly increase the prominence of the side addition, as the proposal would appear cumulatively deeper, wider and taller than previous extensions. This, together with the fact that the proposed addition would obscure more of the flank wall of the cottage, would harmfully erode the appreciation of its compact form, to the detriment of the significance of this heritage asset.
16. By bringing the extension closer to the front elevation of Spring Cottage, the appeal scheme would also adversely affect the appreciation of the listed buildings as a mirrored pair of cottages. The proposed extension would be partially screened by the existing soft landscaping along the site's road frontage, but it would still remain visible within the street scene. Furthermore, there is no certainty that the soft landscaping would be retained in place for the lifetime of the extension.
17. The proposed development and works would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of Spring Cottage and Thatch Cottage. To that harm, I

attach significant importance and weight. In such circumstances, paragraph 196 of the Framework advises that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. It is argued that the appeal scheme could improve the sustainability of the property, which would be beneficial for existing and future occupiers. There is however no substantive evidence suggesting that the continued occupation of the listed property is dependent on the proposed development and works. Overall, the presented public benefits would not outweigh the harm identified.

18. For the reasons detailed above, the proposed development and works would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of Spring Cottage and Thatch Cottage, as well as their settings. The appeal scheme would therefore conflict with CS Policy CP3, LP Policies TB24 and TB26 and Section 16 of the Framework, which notably seek to ensure that development proposals have no detrimental impact upon important heritage features, whilst conserving and seeking the enhancement of designated heritage assets and their settings.

Other considerations

19. The Framework states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. Furthermore, paragraph 144 adds that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. As detailed above, the appellant has indicated that the appeal scheme would improve the sustainability of the property in such a manner that it will be suitable for future generations. No substantive evidence has however been presented in this regard, thus limiting the weight which can be afforded to this consideration.

Planning Balance

20. The proposal would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would reduce openness. Substantial weight is ascribed to the inappropriate nature of the proposed extension, but also the harm to openness and rural character of the area. Great weight is afforded to the harm which would be caused to the significance of the Grade II listed buildings and their settings. The appeal scheme would therefore conflict with national and local planning policy.
21. Against that, I afford some weight to the benefits which would be derived from the proposal for existing and future occupiers of the property. However, the harm caused by the proposal would not be clearly outweighed by other considerations advanced in support, whether taken individually or cumulatively. Consequently, the very special circumstances that are necessary to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt do not exist.

Conclusion

22. For the reasons detailed above, and having regard to all matters raised, I conclude that both appeals should be dismissed.

S Edwards
INSPECTOR