



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 March 2021

by G Ellis BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 05 July 2021.

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/D/21/3267208

Little Orchard, Robin Hood Lane, Sutton Green, Guildford, Surrey GU4 7QG

- 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 Lorna Richards against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PLAN/2020/0881, dated 7 October 2020, was refused by notice dated 9 December 2020.
 - The development proposed is a hip to gable and dormer loft conversion
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are: -
 - Whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework);
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - The effect on the host property and the character and appearance of the area; and
 - If the proposal 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 which would be necessary to justify it.

Reasons

Whether Inappropriate Development

3. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. Reflecting the Framework policy CS6 of the Woking Core strategy (2012) (CS) and policy DM13 of the Woking Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (2016) (DPD) seek to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development.
4. DPD policy DM13 sets out that extensions and alterations to buildings in the Green Belt are an exception to inappropriate development where the proposal does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the

original building. The supporting text to the policy explains how the Council assess such proposals; indicating that a comparison will be made between the size of the original building with the proposed extension taking account of siting, floorspace, bulk and height. It goes on to explain that the expectation is that to be acceptable proposals will be within the range of 20 to 40% above the original volume of the building.

5. There is some flexibility in the assessment, nevertheless, figures provided by appellant clearly show that the existing building, which has previously been extended, now has a volume in excess of 40% more than the original dwelling¹. I accept that the increase in volume from the proposed loft conversion would on its own be limited, however taking into account the cumulative effect of the previous extensions I agree with the Council's assessment that the development would collectively result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
6. Consequently, the proposal would be inappropriate development that is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt, and in conflict with the Framework unless very special circumstances can be clearly demonstrated.

Openness

7. An essential characteristic of Green Belts is their openness. The proposed development would introduce additional mass to the upper part of the building. It would therefore not spatially impact on site coverage. Visually there would be an increase in the scale and bulk of the building and from the street there would be a reduction in the gap between Little Orchard and the neighbouring property, Holly Tree House. Therefore, whilst very limited, the development would give rise to some loss of openness. Accordingly, it adds to the harm to the Green Belt.

Character and Appearance

8. Little Orchard is a detached house located within a small row of properties along Robin Hood Lane. The group of white buildings are of a traditional style, with relatively simple forms and have hipped roofs. There is a single detached property of a contemporary design to the other side of the road, but otherwise the area is open countryside/agricultural land and generally has a rural character.
9. To facilitate the loft conversion the existing hipped roof would be changed to a gable end on the southern elevation, with the flat roofed dormer extending across the majority of the rear roof slope up to the existing gable projection. In my view the scale and form of the development would create a cluttered and prominent roof form to the detriment of both the host property and the character of the area.
10. Contrary to the appellant's position the dormer window would in part be visible from the street scene, and moreover just because the dormer is to the rear does not mean design requirements are not applicable. The large scale and form of the dormer would be a dominant feature which would be contrary to the guidance in the Woking Design SPD (2015) which indicates that dormer

¹ Volume calculations – original dwelling total 345.67, existing dwelling total 674.89, total additional volume proposed 34.55, increase in volume over original 363.77.

windows would usually be granted if they are a subordinate feature of the roofscape and in keeping with the character of the dwelling and street scene.

11. The appellant has drawn my attention to examples of other dormer windows in the vicinity, however these relate to chalet bungalows and have a different context. Little Orchard is sited in the middle of a small group of two storey dwellings which have a distinctive form. The alterations would significantly interrupt the existing rhythm of the roofscape in the street scene and visually reduce the gap to the neighbouring property which would be harmful to the prevailing character of the area.
12. I therefore conclude that the scale and form of the development would not reflect and respect the character of the existing property or appearance of the area. The proposal would be contrary to CS policy CS21 and the Design SPD which jointly, among other things, seek a high standard of design and for development to respect and make a positive contribution to the street scene and the character of the area.

Other Considerations

13. The appellant has put forward a number of factors in support of the proposal. Planning permission was previously granted, but not built, for a two-storey rear extension (Council reference 2006/1118) which they consider would have had a greater impact on the Green Belt. There are no specific details of that scheme before me, and the planning permission has now expired, therefore it is not a matter to which I give any weight.
14. Reference has also been made to the potential use of permitted development rights. Again, I have no specific details of such proposals but in any event the appellant indicates that this is not a route they want to take. As such, this does not represent a genuine fallback to which I can give weight.
15. I accept that the alterations would provide positive benefits for the appellant through enhanced living accommodation, and there may also be opportunities to accommodate energy efficient measures. Additionally, the Council have raised no concerns with the development in terms of impact on the neighbouring properties and I have no reason to disagree with the Council's assessment, however, the absence of harm in these matters is a neutral factor.

Green Belt Balance

16. Very special circumstances can only exist if the harm I have identified is clearly outweighed by other considerations. I have found harm to the Green Belt by way of inappropriateness and openness, and other harm in terms of the impact on the host property and the character of the area. As set out in paragraph 144 of the Framework substantial weight is given to harm to the Green Belt. Despite having regard to all the other considerations put before me in favour of the scheme by the appellant, I conclude that these other considerations taken together, do not clearly outweigh the harm that I have identified to the Green Belt.
17. The development would conflict with CS policy CS6 and DPD policy DM13 both of which relate to development in the Green Belt, and CS policy CS21 and SPD in relation to design. Accordingly, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist and the proposal does not represent sustainable development.

18. For the reason set out above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

G Ellis

INSPECTOR