



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 26 July 2021

by Alexander O'Doherty LLB (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5 August 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3630/D/21/3273139

Trystings, Hamm Court, Addlestone KT13 8YB

- 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 Collette Marlow-Prince against the decision of Runnymede Borough Council.
 - The application Ref RU.21/0006, dated 21 December 2020, was refused by notice dated 25 February 2021.
 - The development proposed is described as, "Additional first floor extension, to the rear additional fenestration".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. During the course of the appeal the revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published, which replaced the February 2019 version. The parties were provided with an opportunity to comment on its relevance to this appeal. Although no comments were received, as the Framework is a material consideration in planning decisions, I have had regard to it in the determination of this appeal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the Framework and development plan policy;
 - the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - if the proposal would be 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 necessary to justify it.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

4. The Framework establishes that the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt is inappropriate. There are however a limited number of exceptions

- to this, as set out in paragraph 149 of the Framework. The relevant one to this proposal is c) which relates to 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. This principle is reflected in Policy EE14 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan (adopted 2020) (Local Plan), which also states that, when assessing a proposal, the planning history of the site (post 1st July 1948) including any previous extensions or enlargements including previous works carried out under permitted development should be taken into account.
5. The appellant has referred to the wider characteristics of the locality, but the Framework and Policy EE14 require an assessment of the proposal against the original building. Hence, the proposal has been assessed on its own merits.
 6. The Council have stated that the original building had approximately 143sqm of floorspace, and that previous extensions have resulted in a floorspace increase of approximately 47sqm, or approximately 32% over and above the size of the original building. These figures have not been disputed by the appellant.
 7. Although there would be no increase in the footprint of the building, and the proposed new bedroom would occupy the same area above the living room and kitchen on the ground floor, the proposed extension would add approximately 65sqm of floorspace (when measured externally), which would, in combination with the existing extensions, constitute a very significant uplift in floorspace in comparison with the original building. Furthermore, the proposed extension would span the entire width of its host property, and would extend higher than its existing ridge line.
 8. As such, even though the proposal would not reduce the depth of the plot, the proposal would involve a considerable increase in size, which when taken in combination with the previous additions, would result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building. The proposal therefore constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the Framework and Policy EE14 of the Local Plan. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt.

Openness

9. The Framework denotes openness as an essential characteristic of the Green Belt. The openness of the Green Belt has a spatial aspect as well as a visual aspect. 'Open' can mean the absence of development in spatial terms, and it follows that openness can be harmed even when development is not readily visible from the public realm.
10. The proposal would increase the size of the property and would increase its mass, meaning that the openness of the Green Belt would, both visually and spatially, be reduced. Although the impact to openness would be limited and localised, harm would result to the Green Belt. This would be in addition to the harm I have identified in regard to the first main issue.

Character and appearance

11. The appeal site comprises a detached bungalow, its rear garden which is close to the Thames, and a detached garage which has an access drive leading to it. Detached 2-storey dwellings are located either side of the site. Open fields are present opposite the street. The site is located within the Hamm Court estate.

Although nearby properties exhibit a mix of styles and architectural designs, they generally have a pleasing and legible appearance.

12. As it is a bungalow, the appeal property has a low profile. The proposal would add an additional storey to the rear of the property, which would extend beyond both the existing ridge line and the eaves height of the roof. It would also span the full-width of the rear of the property. The flat roof of the proposed extension would be consistent with both the existing roof at the rear of the property and the roof of the garage, and the new roof would not be higher than the highest point of either of the 2 adjacent properties. The front building line would not be affected and there would be little impact on the rhythm of development on the street.
13. Nevertheless, due to its considerable scale and massing the proposal would appear as an incongruous and bulky addition to its modestly-sized host property, and as it would noticeably rise above the existing ridge line it would not integrate well with its host property. In particular, the upper-most part of the extension would tower over the elevation facing the street, thereby highlighting the extension's lack of harmony with its host property. Therefore, harm would result to the character and appearance of the host property. I observed that despite the set-back of the property from the road frontage, the proposal would still be clearly seen in wider views. Accordingly, the contribution that the appeal property makes to the character of the streetscene would be significantly eroded and it follows that harm to the character and appearance of the area would occur as a result.
14. Thus, I find that the proposal would have an unacceptable and harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It would conflict with Policy EE1 of the Local Plan which provides that, amongst other things, all development proposals will be expected to achieve high quality and inclusive design which responds to the local context. It would also conflict with paragraph 130 of the Framework which provides that, amongst other things, planning decisions should ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character.

Other considerations

15. The Framework makes it clear at paragraph 148 that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. It establishes 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.
16. The proposal would be acceptable with respect to the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring properties. However, this consideration is a neutral factor, which does not weigh in favour of the proposal.
17. The proposal would improve the living accommodation available to the appellant. However, as this would mainly be a private benefit, this has been given limited weight.
18. The appellant has referred to Class AA of Part 1 of Schedule 2 of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (GPDO), which relates to the enlargement of a dwellinghouse by construction of additional storeys. However, as this right is subject to a prior

approval procedure which entails the consideration of a number of criteria, the outcome of any prior approval application would not be certain. Additionally, no evidence of a prior approval application has been provided. Consequently, I am not persuaded that there is a greater than a theoretical possibility that permitted development rights would be exercised. Limited weight is therefore given to this matter.

19. No concerns have been raised with respect to flood risk. Hence, the proposal would comply with Policy EE13 of the Local Plan, which seeks to manage flood risk, and with section 14 of the Framework. Additionally, the proposed new floorspace at first floor level would provide an additional means of refuge and / or escape in the event of a flood, which is especially relevant at the appeal site considering its closeness to the Thames. Considering that the site is at a high risk of flooding, I have given this matter moderate weight.

Balancing of considerations and whether very special circumstances exist

20. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would result in the loss of its openness. These matters carry substantial weight. Additionally, the proposal would give rise to harm to the character and appearance of the area. Taken together, I find that the other considerations in this case do not clearly outweigh the harm that I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist. Therefore, the proposal would not comply with the Green Belt aims of Policy EE14 of the Local Plan, or the Framework, and consequently would be unacceptable.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons given above, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework, and all other material considerations, the appeal is dismissed.

Alexander O'Doherty

INSPECTOR