

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 November 2021

by Simon Warder MA BSc(Hons) DipUD(Dist) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 November 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/K2230/D/21/3266810

Greenbank, Rhododendron Avenue, Meopham, Gravesend DA13 0TU

- 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 Anna Evans against the decision of Gravesham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20200883, dated 2 September 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 October 2020.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of garage to form a one bedroom annex with shower, kitchen living and dining spaces and the insertion of a roof window within the roof of the main dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been updated since the parties' appeal submissions were made. They were given the opportunity to comment on any consequences of the revised version for the appeal, but neither indicated that there were substantial implications. I agree and have referred to paragraph numbers from the revised version.
3. The Council does not object to the insertion of the rooflight into the roof of the main dwelling. I agree and have framed the main issues accordingly.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether or not the conversion and extension of the garage would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the conversion and extension of the garage on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the conversion and extension of the garage on the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings;
 - other considerations;
 - whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations. If so, would this amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the conversion and extension of the garage?
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Reasons

Whether inappropriate development?

5. The appeal site falls within the Green Belt (GB). Paragraphs 147 and 148 of the Framework state that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the GB and that substantial weight should be given to any such harm. Paragraph 149 advises that new buildings in the GB should be regarded as inappropriate with specific exceptions. One of these 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.
6. Policy C13 of the Gravesham Local Plan 1st Review (LP) seeks to limit extensions to dwellings in the GB to one third of the gross floor area of the original dwelling. The Council's evidence is that the original dwelling was what is now an outbuilding to the rear of the main dwelling. Its calculations indicate that the proposal would result in the floor area increasing by 75% above the original. These matters have not been disputed by the appellant.
7. Policy C13 also seeks to ensure that the appearance, massing, scale and form of any extension is appropriate to the existing dwelling and GB setting. The proposed dormers in the garage roof would be prominent in the street scene. They would dominate the front and rear slopes of the roof and add significantly to the bulk of the existing building. As such, the alteration to the garage would be at odds with the appearance, massing and form of the existing building and, therefore, conflict with LP Policy C13. Taking the increases in floor area and the bulk of the garage together, the alterations would be a disproportionate addition over the size of the original dwelling and amount to inappropriate development in the GB.

Openness

8. Although the proposed dormers would not increase the footprint of the existing building, their bulk and prominence would add to the scale of built development at the site. The creation of the annex would also intensify the use of the site. The proposal would, therefore, result in a minor adverse impact on the openness of the GB and be contrary to Framework paragraph 137.

Character and appearance

9. While the existing form of the garage is in keeping with others in the immediate vicinity, there are no other examples of comparably large and prominent dormers in garage conversions or the like. I have already found that the proposed dormers would be prominently located and add significantly to the bulk of the existing building. The dormers would, therefore, be incongruous and harmful to the character and appearance of the existing building and its surroundings. Consequently, the alterations would conflict with Policy CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) (CS) which requires new development to be visually attractive, conserve and enhance local character and integrate well with its surroundings. Nor would it accord with Framework paragraph 130 which has similar aims.

Other considerations

10. The appellant argues that the proposal would allow the converted garage to be used by visitors. Reference is also made to a dormer window doorway

providing disabled access for guests who cannot manage the stairs. However, the garage dormers would only facilitate access to the first floor via a new staircase. It is not clear therefore, how this would benefit disabled visitors who cannot use the stairs. In any event, there is nothing to suggest that the existing main dwelling provides less than satisfactory living conditions and the provision of additional accommodation for visitors would be a very limited public benefit.

Green Belt balance

11. Framework paragraph 148 advises that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. I have also found that the conversion and alteration of the garage would result in a minor adverse impact on the openness of the GB and be harmful to the character and appearance of the area.
12. Overall, I find that the other considerations in this case do not clearly outweigh the GB and other harm. Looking at the case as a whole therefore, I consider that the very special circumstances necessary to overcome the GB harm have not been demonstrated. The conversion and alteration of the garage, therefore, would conflict with LP Policy C13, CS Policy CS19 and Framework paragraphs, 130, 137, 147, 148 and 149. Consequently, it would not amount to sustainable development and is not supported by CS Policy CS01, which presumes in favour of sustainable development, or CS Policy CS02 to the extent that it seeks to protect the GB.

Conclusion

13. For the reasons set out above, the appeal should be dismissed.

Simon Warder

INSPECTOR