



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 February 2023

by L Hughes BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21st March 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/M0655/W/22/3305361

516 Stockport Road, Grappenhall and Thelwall, Warrington WA4 2TJ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for planning permission
 - The appeal is made by N Bond against Warrington Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 2022/40917, is dated 31 January 2022.
 - The development proposed is a part single storey and part two storey extension to front, side and rear.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed and planning permission for proposed part single storey and part two storey extension to front, side and rear is refused.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Council's statement clarifies that the application would have been refused if a decision had been made, and provides its reasoning.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - Whether the development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') (2021) and any relevant development plan policies;
 - The effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - Whether any 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

Inappropriate development in the Green Belt

4. The appeal site falls within land defined as Green Belt. Policy CS5 of the Warrington Local Plan Core Strategy ('the Core Strategy') (2014) states that development proposals within the Green Belt will be approved where they accord with relevant national policy.
5. The Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and

should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The Framework establishes that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions.

6. One such exception identified in paragraph 149 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. An assessment of whether a proposal would amount to a disproportionate addition is a matter of planning judgement, as the Framework does not provide a specific definition. However, the Council's House Extensions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (2021) section 2.4 identifies that the Council considers an increase to an original building of over 33% in floorspace and volume, to be disproportionate.
7. The proposal would increase the dwelling's footprint, floorspace, and volume. The main parties have presented slightly different figures for the increase. The Council suggests a volume increase of 71%, footprint increase of 96%, and floorspace increase of around 70%, and notes that it does not hold information as to whether the single garage on the site is part of the original building. The appellant refers to a floor area increase of 77%, although does not specify whether this refers to footprint or floorspace. However, notwithstanding these differences, even using the most conservative estimate this would result in a dwelling approximately 70% larger in floorspace than the original. Alongside consideration of the associated and cumulative massing of the extensions, this increase would amount to a substantial addition to the property, and one which I find to be disproportionate over and above the size of the original building.
8. For these reasons, the appeal proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful. I give substantial weight to any harm to the Green Belt. The proposal would therefore conflict with policy CS5 of the Core Strategy, the House Extensions SPD, and the Green Belt policy set out in the Framework, particularly paragraphs 137 and 138.

Openness

9. 516 Stockport Road is a semi-detached 2 storey dwelling. It lies within a ribbon of residential development on both sides of the road, set within surrounding fields and in an area with a strong rural character.
10. A fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to keep land permanently open, as set out in the Framework paragraph 137. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt that has spatial as well as visual aspects. Spatially, the erection of the extensions would result in built development where there is presently none. The appeal proposal would thus increase the volume, height, and massing of the existing dwelling. Visually, the appeal property is visible from the road, neighbouring properties, and fields.
11. The openness of the Green Belt is clearly evident around the property and the wider area. The proposal would result in moderate harm to openness both spatially and visually, to which I give substantial weight as set out in the Framework.

Other Considerations

12. The appellant suggests that because a nearby dwelling at 502 Stockport Road gained permission in 2018 for a larger extension than the appeal scheme, this is very special circumstances for the appeal dwelling. I noted the size and

massing of that extension on my site visit, alongside other properties along the road which appeared to have incorporated various types of extension. However, I have not been presented with sufficient information to allow for a detailed comparison against the appeal proposal, such as whether there were any other considerations which the Council may have taken into account which amounted to very special circumstances. Even if I did have such further information, the assessment of Green Belt impact is necessarily a matter of planning judgement depending on the specific site circumstances. Therefore, this example has had only very limited favourable weight as a precedent in my decision.

13. A single storey rear extension to the appeal dwelling was granted under Prior Approval in January 2022¹. That extension would be smaller than the appeal proposal overall, and would therefore be less harmful to the Green Belt. It therefore carries no positive weight in this regard.
14. The Council does not consider that the proposed development would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area, and identifies that it would comply with policy QE7 of the Core Strategy, the aims of the House Extensions SPD, and Section 16 of the Framework. In particular, Policy QE7 seeks to ensure a high quality place, aiming for proposals to enhance the character and appearance of the area, and harmonise with the scale, proportions, and materials of surrounding buildings. I agree that the proposal would comply with these policies. However, compliance with the development plan is only of neutral weight in my Green Belt assessment of other considerations.

Green Belt Balance

15. In summary, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the terms set out by the Framework and also would result in a harmful loss of openness to the Green Belt. The Framework requires that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. For the reasons set out above these harms would not be clearly outweighed by any other considerations, and therefore, the very special circumstances required to justify a grant of planning permission have not been demonstrated.

Conclusion

16. In conclusion, the scheme would cause harm to the Green Belt and would conflict with the development plan as a whole. With no other material considerations indicating otherwise, for the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

L Hughes

INSPECTOR

¹ Reference 2022/40556