



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 May 2023

by E Dade BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 2 June 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/G2245/D/22/3304541

Holmwood, Knatts Valley Road, Knatts Valley, Kent TN15 6XX

- 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 Ms Georgina Dawson against the decision of Sevenoaks District Council.
 - The application Ref 22/00867/HOUSE, dated 29 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 24 May 2022.
 - The development proposed is ground floor side / rear extensions, loft conversion, floor plan redesign and all associated works at Holmwood.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies.
 - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt.
 - The effect of the proposal on the landscape and scenic beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
 - 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 required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate

3. The appeal property is a detached house within the Green Belt. As set out at paragraph 149 of the Framework, new development within the Green Belt is generally regarded as inappropriate. However, the Framework provides certain exceptions that are not inappropriate, including 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.
4. Policy GB1 of the Sevenoaks Allocations and Development Management Plan 2015 (ADMP) sets out criteria for the extension of dwellings in the Green Belt, including that the total floorspace of the proposal, together with previous

extensions, alterations and outbuildings within 5m of the existing dwelling, would not result in an increase of more than 50% above the floorspace of the original dwelling as existing on 1st July 1948, or as first built thereafter.

5. The site's planning history confirms that, whilst the detached garage building contributes to the floorspace of the original dwelling, the existing extensions and outbuilding do not. In calculating the original dwelling's floorspace, drawing no B56595-3102 A includes those existing extensions and outbuilding, and therefore does not comply with the method set out in Policy GB1. Taking into account the demolition of existing outbuildings, the Council estimates the proposed floorspace would exceed the original dwelling's floorspace by 115.9%, thus significantly breaching Policy GB1's 50% limit.
6. The proposal would therefore result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original dwelling and would not comply with Policy GB1. The proposal would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt, which paragraph 147 of the Framework states is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Green Belt openness

7. Paragraph 137 of the Framework describes the essential characteristics of Green Belt being its openness and permanence and states the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.
8. As set out above, the proposal would significantly increase the dwelling's floorspace. The appeal property is a bungalow with a pitched roof and living accommodation within the roof space. Whilst the proposal would not exceed the height of the existing chimney, the proposal would increase the height of the dwelling beyond the level of the existing roof ridge. The proposal would increase the scale of the main part of the dwelling to two-storeys, with a single storey side projection. The proposed design would add substantial height, bulk and mass to the building's form.
9. Whilst the appeal site is screened by trees and vegetation at the rear and side boundaries, the site is sloping, and the appeal property is visible above the height of the fence and gate at the front boundary. The removal of outbuildings would provide a more compact form of development and a reduction in built footprint. However, those outbuildings are of single storey height and therefore of limited visibility. Through increasing its height and mass, the proposal would increase the dwelling's visual prominence in the street scene.
10. Openness has both spatial and visual elements. The spatial impacts arising from the proposal would be the loss of Green Belt openness from the increased floorspace, height, and massing of the dwelling. Visual harm would arise from the increased height and mass of the dwelling. The proposal would not therefore comply with Policy GB1 which restricts development which materially harms the openness of the Green Belt through excessive scale, bulk and visual intrusion.

AONB landscape and scenic beauty

11. The appeal site is located within the Kent Downs AONB, and is situated on a narrow, rural lane flanked by trees and hedges. Dwellings are well-spaced in large plots, with views of sloping hillsides and woodlands to the rear. The area

appears generally green and open, with a scenic beauty characteristic of the AONB landscape.

12. The appeal property is currently in need of repair and restoration following a long period of standing vacant, to the detriment of its appearance. However, the scale, form, and style of the appeal property is broadly similar to surrounding dwellings which are predominantly detached, single storey, with pitched roofs and exterior render.
13. The proposed use of black cladding references traditional vernacular architecture and the flat roof design seeks to minimise the height of the building. However, the proposed form and extensive glazing would give the building a contemporary appearance, out of keeping with surrounding dwellings.
14. As discussed above, the proposal would significantly increase the scale of the dwelling, and the design would increase the dwelling's height, bulk, and mass, and therefore its visual prominence within the landscape. The proposal would therefore reduce the openness of the AONB and would thus harm the AONB's landscape and scenic beauty.
15. The proposal would not therefore comply with ADMP Policy EN5, which provides AONBs and their settings with the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty and requires proposals to both conserve and enhance landscape character. Paragraph 176 of the Framework instructs that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs.

Other considerations

16. The proposal would return the appeal property to a good standard of accommodation, and through extension of an existing dwelling promotes efficient and effective use of land. The proposal would support the local economy through generating employment during the construction stage, and through contributing council tax payments.
17. The proposal would significantly enhance the energy and thermal efficiency of the dwelling with solar panels, a high standard of insulation, and updated glazing. The proposal would therefore reduce emissions associated with energy production and consumption. The appellant has undertaken extensive tree planting and plans to continue to enhance biodiversity through further tree planting and installation of nest boxes.
18. Whilst the proposal offers a range of benefits, their extent and scope would be commensurate with a single dwelling, and as such I attach modest weight.
19. Since the proposal does not change the number of dwellings on the site, the effects in respect of the area's housing land supply would be neutral. Through increasing the size of the dwelling, the proposed development would better accommodate the appellant's family. However, this is a private interest to which I can ascribe no weight.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

20. As set out above, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would harm openness. Paragraph 148 of the Framework instructs that substantial weight be given to any harm to the Green Belt.
21. The Framework indicates that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. At paragraph 148, the Framework states that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
22. The proposal would provide a range of benefits, to which I attach modest weight. In addition, to achieve the benefits described does not necessitate the construction of disproportionate additions to the dwelling.
23. The modest benefits of the proposal do not therefore clearly outweigh the substantial harm to Green Belt openness, and the harm to the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB, to which I attach great weight. The other considerations do not amount to very special circumstances, and the Framework indicates the appeal proposal should be refused.
24. For the reasons given above, having assessed the case against the development plan as a whole and having had regard to all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

E Dade

INSPECTOR