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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 July 2023 by Thomas Courtney BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

**Decision by Martin Seaton BSc(Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 07 August 2023**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/Q3630/X/23/3315132**

**Offemia, 2 Northern Burway, Laleham Reach, Chertsey KT16 8RP**

- 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 Corrine Willis against the decision of Runnymede Borough Council.
  - The application Ref RU.22/1801, dated 22 November 2022, was refused by notice dated 16 January 2023.
  - The development is a proposed pitched roof over existing bungalow footprint to form habitable accommodation at first floor.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by a representative of the Inspector whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

### Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
  - Whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') and development plan policy;
  - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
  - if the development would be inappropriate, whether the harm to the Green Belt by way 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 it.

### Reasons for the Recommendation

*Whether the development would be inappropriate development*

4. The appeal property comprises a single storey detached bungalow situated on the banks of the river Thames and within the Green Belt. It is accessed via a small pathway off Northern Burway. The existing building is square-shaped and low in height as it features a relatively flat roof. A conservatory is attached to the front elevation whilst the rear of the property features a paved terrace and a stepped access to the river.
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5. Paragraph 149 of the Framework states that new development is inappropriate in the Green Belt unless it falls within the given list of exceptions. Under exception (c) the extension or alteration of a building would not be inappropriate provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
6. The officer report states that the proposal would result in a 61% increase in floor area over the size of the original dwelling. This is disputed by the appellant who state that the proposed development would represent an increase in floor area of just 28.5% over the original dwelling. However, even accepting the lower of the two figures quoted by the parties, it is considered that an increase in floor area of 28.5% would be significant and disproportionate.
7. National guidance on measuring 'proportionality' refers in the NPPF to 'size'. This can, in my view, refer to volume, height, external dimensions, footprint, floorspace or visual perception. In this case, the increase in floorspace, height and overall scale and mass over the original building would be considerable. Whilst the appellant emphasises the fact that the resultant dwelling would have a smaller footprint given the removal of the conservatory, the additional built form and volume of development at first floor level would result in significantly greater visual bulk. I therefore find that the scale of the proposed development would be disproportionate.
8. On this basis, the proposal would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would not accord with the exemption outlined at Paragraph 149(c) of the Framework.

#### *Openness*

9. Openness is identified in the Framework as one of the Green Belt's essential characteristics. It has identified as being formed of a spatial aspect as well as a visual aspect. The additional bulk and volume as a result of the proposed pitched roof and first floor accommodation would materially impact on openness in a spatial aspect resulting in some limited harm to the Green Belt.
10. Furthermore, the increase in height of the building means the proposal would also have a greater visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt. The proposed pitched roof would be easily visible to surrounding occupiers to the west and south-east as well as from Northern Burway and other public vantage points on the opposite side of the river. It would therefore feature prominently and constitute a disproportionate and incongruous visual impact. For these reasons, the proposed development would result in an adverse impact on both the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt resulting in limited harm to the Green Belt.
11. Given the above, the proposal would lead to a loss of Green Belt openness and would impact on the Green Belt purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment contrary to the Framework. It would also conflict with Policy EE14 of the Council's *Runnymede Local Plan 2030* which seeks to ensure that the extension of a building in the Green Belt including changes in mass, bulk and height as well as roof form changes and features, do not result in disproportionate additions.

### *Other considerations*

12. The Framework highlights that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances, with substantial weight given to any harm to the Green Belt. 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.
13. In this regard, the appellant opines that the proposal allows for the creation of a safe place of refuge during times of flooding and that this should be seen as providing very special circumstances. Whilst I acknowledge that the first-floor accommodation would appear to provide a safe place of refuge and that the proposal would also remove approximately 16sq metres from the existing building's footprint in flood zones 3a and 3b due to the removal of the conservatory, the scale and prominence of the proposed extensions and roof would be excessive. This consideration therefore would only lend limited weight in support of the proposal, with the adverse impact of the extensions on both the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt outweighing the personal safety concerns of the appellants in this instance.
14. I have had regard to the supportive comments to the development submitted by neighbouring occupiers. These include the design of the proposed dwelling as being in-keeping with the surrounding area, and the benefits the proposals would have to the general condition of the building. However, although I appreciate that the walls and roof of the existing bungalow appear to require improvement, these could be carried out with an alternative design and without the scale of development as proposed. I do not therefore find these considerations to lend any significant weight in support of the proposal.

### **Planning Balance and Overall Conclusion**

15. I consider that the development causes harm to the Green Belt by way of its inappropriateness and limited harm to its openness, and substantial weight must be given cumulatively to this harm. On balance, the very limited weight attributed to the other considerations in this case does not clearly outweigh the substantial harm I have identified. I conclude therefore there are no very special circumstances to justify the development.

### **Recommendation**

16. For the reasons given above and having had regard to all other matters raised, I recommend that the appeal should be dismissed.

*Thomas Courtney*

APPEAL PLANNING OFFICER

### **Inspector's Decision**

17. I have considered all the submitted evidence and my representative's recommendation and on that basis the appeal is dismissed.

*Martin Seaton*

INSPECTOR