

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 November 2022

by C Harding BA (Hons) PGCert PGDip MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9th January 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/M5450/W/22/3300987

15, 16 and 17 Little Common, Stanmore HA7 3BZ

- 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 Beazer Investments Ltd against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Harrow.
 - The application Ref P/4931/21, dated 17 December 2021, was refused by notice dated 28 March 2022.
 - The development proposed is 1st floor rear extension to all 3 houses.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. In reaching this decision, I have had regard to the revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') that was published on 20 December 2023 but, as it does not involve changes to national policy affecting the proposal, I have not sought the parties' comments upon it.
3. The appeal relates to extensions to a terrace of three properties. In the interests of clarity, I have considered the proposal on the basis of it comprising a single extension to a single building.
4. The proposed plans show first storey extensions over ground floor projections. These ground floor projections were not present at the time of my site visit, although planning permission has been granted for them. As the ground floor extensions would be an integral part of the development, I have considered the appeal on this basis. I have sought the views of the appellant on this approach, and no objections have been raised to me doing so.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are;
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and any relevant development plan policies;
 - the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the proposal upon the character and appearance of the area including the Little Common Conservation Area, and;
 - if the proposal is inappropriate development, 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 development

6. The Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The Framework further establishes that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, subject to a number of exceptions as set out in Paragraph 154. One such exception is the extension or alteration of a building providing that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
7. No definition as to what may amount to a disproportionate addition is provided within the Framework or the development plan. In establishing whether a proposal would represent a disproportionate addition, the Council have used a benchmark of where proposals would increase the footprint and floorspace of a building by over 30%.
8. The Council's figures indicate that the proposal would represent an increase of 41.8% of internal floorspace, a 65.7% increase in footprint and a 52.6% increase in the volume of the properties when considered as a whole, and the accuracy of these figures has not been disputed. Notwithstanding that the Council's 30% benchmark is not established within the development plan, the increases in the floorspace, footprint and volume nevertheless means that the proposal would, objectively, be a sizeable addition to the building.
9. The single storey element of the proposal has already been granted planning permission. Be that as it may, the additional first-floor element of the proposal means that the proposal before me, when considered as a whole, would be of a significantly larger scale in terms of height and bulk in comparison to the original building as defined within the Framework.
10. Overall, I find that the proposed increase of size the building would be disproportionate, and consequently the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful.

Openness

11. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt that has spatial as well as visual aspects. The site is within an area of residential properties, at the fringe of an area of open space and has a semi-rural character. Although the proposal would be located to the rear of the building and in a position where it would not be widely visible from public viewpoints, the resultant building would be spatially, and to a lesser extent visibly, larger than that which currently exists. It would therefore reduce the relatively open character of this part of the Green Belt, albeit this reduction would be limited given the scale of the proposal.
12. This harmful loss of openness would lead to conflict with Policy DM16 of the Harrow Development Management Policies Local Plan ('DMP') which states that the redevelopment of previously developed sites in the Green Belt will be supported where the proposal would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.

Character and appearance

13. The appeal site is located within Little Common Conservation Area ('the CA'). Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that, in making decisions on planning applications and appeals within a conservation area, special attention is paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.
14. The significance of the CA is derived, in part, from its open character and informal groups of buildings, which whilst of mixed design are generally of a vernacular style. This leads to the CA having a semi-rural atmosphere.
15. The appeal site itself comprises a terrace of three dwellings located within an area of other properties. However, despite appearing to be more modern than some other buildings in the area, the simple design, compact scale and traditional materials of the dwellings means that they positively contribute to the character and appearance of the area.
16. The proposal would represent a large addition to the dwellings and would represent bulky and boxlike additions to the otherwise compact scale of them. Although the use of flat roofs reduces the scale of the proposal, this approach would not reflect the character of the area where the use of pitched roofs is predominant.
17. Furthermore, although not widely visible from public vantage points and using materials that would match the dwellings, the proposal would nevertheless significantly alter the character of them, and involving development at first floor level, would be visible from private vantage points within the CA. The requirement to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA remains even where proposals would not be prominent, and the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the CA. I find that this harm would be less than substantial.
18. Paragraph 208 of the Framework states that where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset that this harm should be weighed against any public benefits of the proposal.
19. It is stated that the proposal would represent the efficient use of brownfield land through the use of upwards extensions, support for which is set out within the Framework. The proposal would also contribute towards the local economy through the construction period and associated employment. However, due to the nature and scale of the proposal, such benefits are likely to be short term and minor in scale. It is also argued that the proposal would meet an unmet need for development in the area, however there is no substantive evidence before me in relation to whether such an unmet need exists. Accordingly, I afford this very minor weight as a benefit of the proposal.
20. The public benefits which I have identified above would be limited and do not outweigh the harm that I have identified, and to which I must afford considerable importance and weight.
21. My attention has been drawn to other properties in the area that have previously been extended. However, I have not been provided with any details in relation to specific proposals, or context in relation to the circumstances of these examples. Whilst I saw on my site visit other examples of the extension of dwellings in the area, these appeared to vary in scale and form, and none

appear to wholly reflect the scale and design approach across the rear of three dwellings as proposed in this case. Accordingly, they do not justify the harm that I have identified.

22. I therefore conclude that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area including the CA. There would be conflict with Policies HC1 and D3 of the London Plan ('LP'), Policy CS1 of the Harrow Core Strategy ('HCS'), and DMP Policies DM1 and DM7. Together, and amongst other matters, these policies state that development proposals should conserve the significance of heritage assets, be of a high quality and positively respond to local character and distinctiveness with due regard to building types, forms and proportions. They also require new development to have regard to the bulk and height of proposed buildings in relation to the location and surroundings.
23. The proposal would also conflict with advice within the Harrow Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document which states that a pitched roof will normally be required on two-storey extensions.

Other considerations

24. The Framework states that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
25. The aforementioned public benefits of the scheme are other considerations of limited weight. Even if I was to agree that the proposal would have no effect upon the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers and would continue to provide sufficient outdoor space for occupiers of the appeal properties, these are neutral factors that do not weigh in favour of the proposal.

Green Belt Balance

26. These other considerations do not clearly outweigh the substantial weight that I give to the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and harm to openness, and the harm to the CA. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.
27. It would therefore conflict with LP Policy G2, HCS Policy CS1 and DMP Policy DM16. Together, these policies seek to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development where very special circumstances do not exist, in alignment with the Framework.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

28. The harm to the Green Belt and the CA draws the proposal into conflict with the development plan when read as a whole. No material considerations, including the Framework, indicate that there would be justification for taking a decision other than in accordance with the development plan in this case.
29. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Harding

INSPECTOR