



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 February 2024

by E Dade BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13 February 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/K2230/D/23/3326603

42 Beechwood Drive, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent DA13 0TX

- 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 Mr and Mrs S Ball against the decision of Gravesend Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20230250, dated 14 March 2023, was refused by notice dated 9 May 2023.
 - The development proposed is extensions and new roof with dormers and rooflights. Demolition of existing garage and replacement with new garage, with re-siting of vehicular access
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. During the appeal, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was revised by government. Its content in respect of the main issues has not been materially altered. Therefore, in this instance it has not been necessary to consult the parties on the revisions to the Framework.
3. At time of my site visit, the garage, front boundary wall, and gates had been demolished. The appeal property was partially demolished, and the site was under construction. I have assessed the proposal on the basis of the submitted plans.

Main Issues

4. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to 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 character and appearance of the area.
 - 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

5. The appeal site comprises an existing bungalow and garden located in the Green Belt. The proposed development would extend the appeal property and involve construction of a garage.
6. Saved Policy C13 of the Gravesham Local Plan First Review 2014 (GLPFR) seeks to maintain the open character of the Green Belt, placing an overall limit on the size of extensions to dwellings equivalent to one-third of the gross floor area of the original dwelling, prior to any later extension or alteration. In addition, Saved Policy C13 considers proposals for domestic garages and outbuildings on their individual merits, requiring proposals be well designed, discreetly sited, and subservient to the scale of the main dwelling.
7. At paragraph 225, the Framework states development plan policies adopted prior to the Framework's publication should be afforded due weight having regard to the degree of consistency with it. 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 keep land permanently open. At paragraph 154, the Framework regards the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt as inappropriate but provides certain exceptions that are not inappropriate development within the Green Belt, including the extension or alteration of a building provided it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
8. The Framework does not define the scale of development that would comprise disproportionate additions. Furthermore, the Framework does not identify outbuildings as not inappropriate in the Green Belt. However, the Council has provided details of an appeal decision¹ from within its area in which the Inspector found that an outbuilding could be regarded as an extension to a dwelling. The GLPFR pre-dates the Framework's publication and, through applying restraint upon development in the Green Belt, Saved Policy C13 appears broadly consistent with the Framework and thus should be afforded considerable weight.
9. The appeal property has previously been extended and the floorspace of the original dwelling is estimated to be 50.8sqm. The proposed development would represent a 265% increase of the appeal property's floorspace. Whilst the appellant disputes the inclusion of the proposed first-floor in this calculation, the additional storey would increase the dwelling's floorspace and is therefore a relevant consideration. The proposed extension would significantly exceed the overall floorspace limit set out by Saved Policy C13.
10. Saved Policy C13 allows proposals which exceed the floor area limit where there is no overall effect on the existing bulk and appearance of the dwelling. Through the additional storey and increased footprint, the proposed development would add substantial bulk to the dwelling. In addition, the proposed design, with features including the hipped roof, front and side projections, dormer, and prominent storm porch, would significantly alter the appearance of the dwelling.

¹ APP/K2230/D/21/3282859

11. The proposed garage would contribute a further 15sqm of net additional floorspace. The appellant suggests the garage could be removed from the scheme. However, I have determined the proposal on the basis of the plans as submitted. The proposed garage would be situated at the front of the site, adjacent to the boundary with the highway, and therefore would be sited in a visually prominent location. Therefore, even if I were to treat the garage on its individual merits, rather than as a normal domestic adjunct, the proposed garage would not comply with Saved Policy C13 which requires garages to be sited discreetly.
12. The proposed development would exceed the floorspace limit, contribute additional bulk, and substantially alter the dwelling's appearance, and therefore would not satisfy the requirements of GLPFR Saved Policy C13. On this basis, the proposal would result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. The proposal would therefore be inappropriate development which paragraph 152 of the Framework states is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Openness

13. As set out above, the proposed development would have a substantially greater footprint, height and bulk than the existing dwelling and garage and therefore would significantly increase the built form on the site.
14. The proposed development would be visible from Beechwood Drive, a quiet residential road which, as indicated on the OS plan, forms part of the public rights of way network. The proposed development would appear visually prominent from the vantage point of users of Beechwood Drive including pedestrians using the public right of way.
15. The proposed development would therefore have an adverse impact on Green Belt openness through visual intrusion and through spatial impacts commensurate with the scale of the proposed development.

Character and appearance

16. The area surrounding the appeal site comprises a row of predominantly single-storey and chalet-style detached dwellings of a variety of styles which enclose the western side of Beechwood Drive, a cul-de-sac with no pedestrian footway. To the east, the area is predominantly wooded, with glimpsed views of dwellings set down in the landscape. The area therefore has a quiet, rural, green and open character.
17. The site is located in the Harvel Wooded Downs Landscape Character Area. The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) describes the area as divided into a multitude of small plots that has resulted in sporadic and piecemeal development within coppice woodland, with development appearing dominant and creating an incoherent landscape. The proposed development would significantly increase the bulk and mass of the dwelling, providing a built form which would appear visually dominant within the street scene. The proposal would therefore have an urbanising effect upon the appeal site thereby contributing additional visual detractors within the landscape character area.
18. Other dwellings in the area include a second storey of living accommodation, notable at neighbouring dwelling No 41. However, the proposed form and appearance of the dwelling, which would include a large front projection, high-

positioned eaves, and prominent dormers would appear generally out of keeping with the chalet style of other dwellings in the area.

19. For these reasons, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. Whilst not referenced in the Council's Decision Notice, the Council has provided a copy of Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 (GLPCS) Policy CS19 which is cited in the delegated report and is relevant to matters of design and character. The proposal would conflict with Policy CS19 which requires development make a positive contribution to the street scene and character of the area, taking into account features of landscape value which contribute to local character and sense of place.

Other considerations

20. The appellant asserts that similar extensions have been constructed at other dwellings in the area. The information provided about those other schemes contains no details as to the effects on the dwelling's bulk and appearance or whether very special circumstances exist. Therefore, there is insufficient information to determine whether other schemes are materially similar to the appeal proposal or that refusal of the scheme was not consistent with other decisions. Consequently, I attach only limited weight to the evidence regarding extensions to nearby dwellings.
21. The Council indicates it has recently granted planning permission at the appeal site for a scheme similar to the appeal proposal. However, I note the approved scheme incorporates design changes which collectively reduce the scale of development proposed. The approved scheme is therefore materially different and weighs neither for nor against the appeal proposal.

Whether very special circumstances exist

22. As set out above, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would harm openness. Paragraphs 152 and 153 of the Framework require substantial weight be given to any harm to the Green Belt and that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
23. Paragraph 153 indicates 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. The appellant suggests the scheme is justified by other similar extensions in the area. However, due to the extent of information provided, I attach limited weight to those examples.
24. Such other considerations do not therefore clearly outweigh the substantial harm to Green Belt openness and harm to the character and appearance of the area. Accordingly, the harm to the Green Belt is not clearly outweighed by other considerations identified and therefore the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.
25. For these reasons, the proposal would conflict with GLPCS Policy CS02 which supports development in the Green Belt only where it is compatible with national policy.

Conclusion

26. For the reasons set out above, having regard to the development plan taken as a whole and all other relevant material considerations, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

E Dade

INSPECTOR