



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 February 2024

by K Jones BA (Hons) DipLA CMLI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 07 March 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/D/23/3328644

8 Grange Road, St Leonards And St Ives, Dorset BH24 2QE

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Stuart Bates against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref P/HOU/2023/01785, dated 21 March 2023, was refused by notice dated 8 June 2023.
 - The development proposed is Replacement of existing roof at a higher pitch with front and rear dormers to extend the first floor habitable area. Small increase in ground floor footprint to accommodate larger lounge and utility room addition. Full height entrance to extend up into the central dormer.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues 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 character and appearance of the area; and,
 - 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

3. Policy KS3 of the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy (April 2014) (the Core Strategy) is an overarching strategic policy which sets out that development in the East Dorset District and Christchurch Borough will be contained by the South East Dorset Green Belt. There is no development plan policy which sets out the Council's more detailed approach to decision making in the Green Belt. Consequently, I must turn to the Framework.
4. The Framework identifies that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It goes on to state

that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 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, provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

5. The Framework is clear that the 'original building' is the building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally. In this context, I do not consider that the various outbuildings present at the property, many of which are some distance from the appeal building, are part of the 'original building' to be extended.
6. The appeal proposal would see the existing modest chalet bungalow extended to provide a substantially larger first floor. To facilitate this, a new, wider roof would be erected, with a higher ridge line and large dormers to the front and rear. A two-storey front facing gable feature would also be introduced. I have been presented with differing figures for the proposed change in floorspace area, ranging from an increase in 47% to 69%. An increase of 50% has often been used as a guideline figure for interpreting the term 'disproportionate additions', but I have not been presented with any evidence that this is a policy position taken by the Council. In any event, with either floorspace figure used, there would be a clear and considerable increase in both the floor area and volume of the original dwelling.
7. Taken together, these increases 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. I therefore conclude that the proposal would be inappropriate development that is, by definition, harmful and therefore contrary to national policy to protect the Green Belt.

Openness

8. The Framework states that openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt. It has a spatial as well as a visual aspect. Despite some large trees and boundary vegetation, the appeal property is clearly visible from the adjacent lane. Notwithstanding the existence of other residential development and varied land uses within the vicinity of the appeal site, the openness of the Green Belt is evident around the property and the wider area.
9. The appeal proposal would significantly increase the volume, width, and massing of the first floor of the property. There would also be a modest increase in height. As a visibly prominent enlargement of built form where there is currently a modest bungalow, there would be a moderately harmful loss of openness in both a spatial and a visual aspect. As such, the proposal would conflict with the essential characteristics of the Green Belt and its ability to serve its purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, as set out in paragraphs 142 and 143 of the Framework.

Character and appearance

10. The appeal site is located off Grange Road, and forms one of a number of sporadic dwellings on the lane, interspersed by open areas and occasional commercial or industrial uses. There is a mix of property styles and ages,

though the majority of dwellings are bungalows or chalet bungalows of modest proportions with a low profile. The simple and low-key elevations of the existing dwelling make a positive and consistent contribution to this character.

11. The proposal would introduce a large roof extension, substantially increasing the width and massing of the dwelling at first floor level. I note that the overall height of the building would not be dissimilar from several neighbouring properties, and while not common, modern design and materials are not absent from the area. However, the proposed dormers and large front gable feature would add considerable visible bulk to the property, and alongside the large expanse of the new roof would emphasise the uncharacteristic massing of the building.
12. As noted above, the property is visible from the adjacent lane, set amongst mature trees. The lane is unmetalled, however I observed no restrictions to public access during my site visit. While I accept that the lane is relatively quiet, it also provides access to a number of other residential properties and other land uses on Grange Road. The proposal would therefore result in a noticeable change to the character and appearance of the area.
13. I acknowledge that the proposal is considerably reduced from an earlier scheme which is shown in outline on several of the drawings. The appellant has also clearly spent considerable time and energy on the external landscaping of the site, which provides an attractive and verdant setting to the dwelling. Nevertheless, the proposal would still represent a significant visible increase in bulk and massing at first floor level, at odds with the prevailing character.
14. I therefore find that the proposal would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area. This would conflict with Policy HE2 of the Core Strategy. Amongst other matters, this policy requires proposals to be compatible with or improve its surroundings in respect of scale and bulk.

Other Considerations

15. I note the comments about the structural integrity of the property, and there seems to be no dispute that No 8 would benefit from refurbishment. However, there is little substantive evidence to demonstrate that this proposal would be the only solution to the structural problems of the building. This matter therefore carries limited weight in favour of the appeal.
16. The appellant refers to the potential for large extensions at the property to be carried out under permitted development rights. However, I have been provided with limited detail for such works, and cannot therefore be sure that such development would be a realistic or probable alternative. Nevertheless, taken at face value these details refer only to the maximum floor areas permissible under permitted development rights. I have not been provided with any indication as to what form such a scheme might take, or whether it might have similar effects as the appeal proposal on the openness of the Green Belt or on character and appearance. Therefore, while I accept that extensions may be possible, and that these may include a large floor area, this theoretical possibility does not outweigh the harms that I have found to the Green Belt or the character and appearance of the area.

17. Whilst the Green Belt boundary has not changed significantly since it was first drawn, the Framework is clear that once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the plan-making process. Core Strategy Policy KS3 indicates that the Green Belt boundary was revised to both remove and include some areas to reflect local needs in line with this provision. The appellant has also referred to various developments and land uses locally, however I have not been provided with details of any particular schemes, and none of those mentioned appear to be related to or directly comparable to this site. The age of the Green Belt designation and changes that have occurred in the area do not therefore lessen the substantial weight that the Framework affords any harm to the Green Belt.
18. I accept that the proposal would enhance the living conditions of the occupiers of the property, providing them with additional accommodation. There would also likely be some limited wider environmental benefits from the creation of a more energy efficient home. However, the personal circumstances of the appellant carry little weight in favour of the appeal. Moreover, the environmental benefits from improving the energy efficiency of a single dwelling do not outweigh the harms that I have identified.
19. I note that the Council does not raise concerns in respect of other issues including impact on trees or the privacy of neighbours. However, the absence of harm in these matters is neutral in the planning balance and does not alter my overall conclusion.

Conclusion

20. For these reasons, I conclude that the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt which would result in a moderate reduction in openness. In accordance with the Framework, substantial weight should be attached to any harm to the Green Belt. I have also found harm to the character and appearance of the area, in conflict with Policy HE2 of the Core Strategy.
21. Even taken together, the other considerations in this case carry limited weight in favour of the appeal, and do not clearly outweigh the harms that I have identified. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development have not been demonstrated. Therefore, for the reasons given, the appeal is dismissed.

K Jones

INSPECTOR