

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 March 2024

by R C Shrimplin MA(Cantab) DipArch RIBA FRTPI FCI Arb MCIL

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 June 2024

Appeal Reference: APP/Y3615/D/24/3336978

'Wayside', Dawney Hill, Pirbright, Woking, Surrey GU24 0JB

- 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. Harrison against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application (reference 23/P/01462, dated 29 August 2023) was refused by notice dated 28 December 2023.
 - The development proposed is described in the application form as a "Proposed rear roof extension to enable a loft conversion to habitable accommodation".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr. and Mrs. Harrison (the Appellants) against Guildford Borough Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Main issues

3. The first main issue to be determined in this appeal is whether the proposal is "inappropriate development" having regard to the 'National Planning Policy Framework' and any relevant development plan policies. If so, in this case, it is necessary to consider the effect of the proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt as well as the impact of the proposed development on the character of the host building and its surroundings in the Pirbright Conservation Area. . It is then necessary to determine whether the 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 that are required to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
4. If the proposed development is to be categorised as "not inappropriate", it is nonetheless necessary, in this case, to consider the impact of the proposed development on the character of the host building and its surroundings in the Pirbright Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site is located in a group of detached and semi-detached Victorian houses, that are located on the western frontage of Dawney Hill. There is a belt of woodland on the eastern frontage and open land beyond, part of a military cemetery. In the wider area, pockets of development are interspersed in a more rural landscape and the area is attractive and historic. The Green Belt washes over the area and the appeal site is located within the Pirbright Conservation Area.
6. The existing house at 'Wayside' is not a listed building but is an attractive Victorian detached house that has been extended at the rear. The front part of the house is a two-storey structure of brickwork under a tiled roof, while lower projections at the rear of the house are finished with white render externally. The house was extended in the earlier part of this century, following a grant of planning permission.
7. It is now proposed to alter and extend the house by constructing a rear roof extension to enable a "loft conversion" to be carried out that would create additional habitable accommodation. As part of the scheme, the existing main front roof of the house would be modified.
8. The National Planning Policy Framework was revised in December 2023 but, in this instance, the issues most relevant to the appeal remain unaffected by the revisions that have been made to it. I am therefore satisfied that there is no requirement to seek further submissions on the revised Framework, and that no party would be disadvantaged by such a course of action. In this appeal, I have had regard to the most recent version, of course.
9. The 'National Planning Policy Framework' makes it plain, at paragraphs 152-156, that the construction of new buildings is not normally acceptable in the Green Belt and that they should only be permitted in "very special circumstances", subject to certain exceptions. Nevertheless, an extension to an existing building in the Green Belt can be acceptable "provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building".
10. Provisions in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 impose obligations on those considering whether to grant planning permission to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas affected by development proposals (specifically at Section 72 of the Act).
11. Those formal requirements relating to conservation areas are reinforced by the 'National Planning Policy Framework', especially at Section 16, which emphasises the importance of conserving or enhancing the historic environment, though it also points out the desirability of putting a heritage asset to its "optimum viable use" as does the 'Planning Practice Guidance'.
12. More generally, the 'National Planning Policy Framework' (which was revised in December 2023) also emphasises the aim of "achieving well designed places" in the broadest sense (notably at Section 12), while making effective use of land and encouraging economic activity. It is aimed at achieving good design standards generally, by adding to the overall quality of the area and being

- visually attractive and sympathetic to local character and history (while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change), although it is also recognised that appropriate change may include increased densities.
13. Key policies in the Development Plan are to be found in the 'Guildford Borough Local Plan: strategy and sites 2015-2034' (which was adopted in April 2019) and the 'Guildford Borough Local Plan: Development Management Policies' (which was adopted in March 2023).
 14. Policy D20 of the 'Guildford Borough Local Plan: Development Management Policies' reinforces the statutory duty in relation to conservation areas. It explains that development proposals within a conservation area are expected to preserve or enhance its character and appearance.
 15. Policy P2 of the 'Guildford Borough Local Plan: strategy and sites' underpins the national planning policy relating to the Green Belt. It references the policy that is expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework and it provides that "inappropriate development will not be permitted unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated".
 16. An emphasis on the importance of encouraging good design is also to be found in the Development Plan. Policy D1 of the 'Guildford Borough Local Plan: strategy and sites 2015-2034' (which was adopted in April 2019) and Policies H4 and D4 of the 'Guildford Borough Local Plan: Development Management Policies' (which was adopted in March 2023) are especially relevant. Planning policies that encourage good design also advise that new development should reflect local character.
 17. The Council's 'Residential Extensions and Alterations Supplementary Planning Document' (dated 2018) is also relevant but it does not have the force of the statutory Development Plan.
 18. I accept that, in this case, the original buildings that were on the site as it was in 1948 included outbuildings that have now been incorporated into the habitable accommodation. The main parties to the appeal have put forward different calculations but I have considered the scale of the proposed additions more broadly, taking account of the volume of buildings that were on the site in 1948. The proposals would involve a small increase in the volume of the main roof and an increase in the volume of the rear part of the roof, where two existing gables would be reconstructed as a larger asymmetrical pair of gables.
 19. I am conscious that there is flexibility in the 'National Planning Policy Framework', since it does not impose any specific criteria in terms of floor space or volume, to define "disproportionate" additions. On the contrary, it permits the decision-maker considerable discretion in reaching a conclusion, also taking account of such matters as mass or bulk, for example. In these cases, both national and local planning policies afford flexibility to assess a proposed development overall in arriving at a conclusion as to whether any particular extension should be considered to be "inappropriate" development.
 20. In this appeal, I have noted that the appeal scheme would involve limited alterations to the roofs of the existing building and that previous extensions have incorporated pre-existing outbuildings. I have concluded that the appeal scheme would not result in disproportionate additions to the original

construction on the site and that the proposals ought not to be considered to be "inappropriate" in principle. I accept, moreover, that the proposed additions would be relatively modest in their context and that they would not have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt or on the stated purposes of including land within it).

21. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider the impact of the proposed development on the character of the host building and its surroundings in the Conservation Area and I am concerned about the design quality of the proposals.
22. The proposed alterations and extensions would involve the removal of the existing main roof at the front of the building and its reconstruction to a steeper pitch, with a higher ridge line. These changes would seem to be relatively modest but, nonetheless, I am convinced that they would be significant in architectural terms. I believe that they would have important implications for the character and appearance of the host building (and for its surroundings, therefore).
23. In the various submissions (including those made by Pirbright Parish Council), different opinions are expressed about the architectural impact of the project but I am convinced that the more steeply pitched and larger roof would cause real harm to the character and appearance of the existing building and hence to its surroundings in the Pirbright Conservation Area. The main roof at the front of the building would be awkward and ungainly in its new form, while the rear part of the roof, with a new twin gable would be overly large in the finished scheme. Overall, the new roofs would be unduly large and awkward in appearance, detracting from the architectural quality of the existing building and generating an unnaturally top-heavy composition.
24. Hence, I am convinced that the proposals would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Pirbright Conservation Area and would represent a poor architectural design. Even though the proposed development would make a useful addition to the existing house, I am convinced that the harm that would be done to the host building and its surroundings outweigh the benefits of the project.
25. In short, I have concluded that the scheme before me would conflict with both national and local planning policies (including the Development Plan) and that it ought not to be allowed. Although I have considered all the matters that have been raised in the representations, I have found nothing to cause me to alter my decision.

Roger C. Shrimplin

INSPECTOR