
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 June 2024

by C Hall BSc MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10th July 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/T2215/D/23/3334236

St Fiacre, Green Street Green Road, Darenth, Kent DA2 7HT

- 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 & Mrs O Olaleye against the decision of Dartford Borough Council.
 - The application ref. DA/23/00907/FUL, dated 28 July 2023, was refused by notice dated 3 October 2023.
 - The proposal is for erection of ground, first floor rear extensions, and alterations to front and rear elevations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. Since the determination of the planning application the Council have adopted The Dartford Plan April 2024 (DP), whose policies supersede the Dartford Core Strategy 2011 and the Dartford Development Policies Plan 2017 (DDPP) referenced within the Decision Notice. I have therefore determined the appeal on the basis of the newly adopted policies.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies;
 - the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the existing dwelling and surrounding 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

4. St Fiacre is a detached chalet bungalow with off-street parking on the driveway
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to the front and side. The appeal site borders a nursery to the south and another dwelling to the north. The wider area is comprised of fields and woodland within the Green Belt.

5. The Framework states that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. This is subject to certain exceptions, which include at paragraph 154 (c) '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.'
6. Policy M12 of the DP sets out the Council's approach to the assessment of proposals in the Green Belt. This policy is broadly consistent with the Framework.
7. Whilst the Framework does not define what constitutes a disproportionate addition, Policy DP22 of the superseded DDPP states that proposals that result in volumetric increases of more than 30% over the original building will be resisted, although I note that the figure is not repeated in the newly adopted DP.
8. This notwithstanding, the Council indicates that St Fiacre has not previously been extended and calculates that the proposed scheme would result in the volume of the dwelling being extended over and above the 'original building' by about 96%. The figure is not disputed by the appellants.
9. Judging the scheme in accordance with Policy M12, I consider that the proposed extension, would amount to a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building. This would represent inappropriate development within the Green Belt and would not benefit from the exception in paragraph 154 (c) of the Framework.

Openness

10. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The proposal would be seen from open land surrounding the site and from public viewpoints, notwithstanding the presence of some existing planting around part of the site. The scale and extent of the scheme would be substantially greater than the existing property, creating built form at a higher level where previously there was none. Overall, I find there would be considerable harm to openness.

Character and appearance

11. At present the bungalow has a hipped roof form with small pitched dormer windows facing front and rear. These would be replaced with a much larger development including a sizeable and unattractive expanse of crowned roof that would serve to emphasise the deep-plan form.
12. The proposed addition would be sited over and to the rear of the current house. It would overwhelm the property, with a significant degree of additional mass and bulk at first floor and roof level. Given its extensive scale and height relative to the chalet bungalow, the proposal would have a much greater visual impact and be particularly apparent when viewed externally from Green Street Green Road, failing to sit comfortably within the constraints of the site.

13. The existing modest property would consequently be obliterated by a conspicuous and discordant scheme, with the overall design appearing boxy and lacking in architectural subtlety.
14. On this basis I am drawn to conclude that the scheme would result in harm to the character and appearance of the existing dwelling and surrounding area. It would be inconsistent with Policies M1 and M10 of the DP, which expect new development to be of a high-quality design that reflects and respects the existing character, setting and local context.

Other considerations

15. I appreciate that the siting of the proposed structure attached to the host dwelling would not result in a stand-alone feature. However, the scheme remains unacceptable for the reasons given above. I am of the view that any enhancements to landscaping within the appeal site would not outweigh the considerable harm on Green Belt and character and appearance grounds.

Green Belt Balance

16. According to paragraphs 152 and 153 of the Framework, inappropriate development in the Green Belt should not be approved except in very special circumstances. These will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, are clearly outweighed by other considerations.
17. I am required by the Framework to give substantial weight to the harm the development would cause to the Green Belt by virtue of its inappropriateness and to openness. Individually or cumulatively, the other considerations do not clearly outweigh this harm. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.

Conclusion

18. Having regard to all matters raised and for the reasons given, the appeal is dismissed.

C Hall

INSPECTOR