

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 September 2024

by H Miles BA (hons), MA, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 08 October 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/D/24/3338645

15 Peakfield, Frensham, Farnham, Surrey GU10 3DX

- 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 & Mrs Jackie Steward of Alchemy House of Design Ltd against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is WA/2023/01970.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing outbuilding and construction of a part two/part single storey side extension.
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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 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 area, including the Surrey Hills National Landscape.
- 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. The Framework sets out that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; and the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The Framework goes on to state that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt. The construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, and thus should be approved only if very special circumstances exist, unless they come within one of the categories in the

closed list of exceptions in paragraphs 154 and 155 of the Framework. This is broadly echoed by Policy RE2 of the Local Plan (Part 1) 2018 (LPP1).

4. Of relevance to this appeal, paragraph 154c) provides an exception for 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. Policy DM14 of the Local Plan (Part 2) 2023 (LPP2) generally follows this exception and additionally states that this will be assessed considering changes in scale, mass, height and floorspace.
5. There is an outbuilding at this property. This is a low level single storey structure which is set back from the road with a Gross External Area (GEA) of around 45sqm. This would be demolished as part of the proposed development. The appellant states that this was constructed with the dwelling. However, the Council refer to aerial photography which shows that the outbuilding was not present in its current form in 2001, and neighbour representations also state that it was constructed in the last 15 years. Based on the evidence before me, I am not satisfied that the existing outbuilding forms part of the original building. Nor is there any detail of any pre-existing structure.
6. On this basis, the submitted drawings therefore show that the original building has a GEA of around 120sqm. The existing property has been previously extended with a two storey rear extension with a hipped and pitched roof above which increases both the floor area and the bulk of the existing property. The extensions proposed include additions with a further increase in floor area at both first and second floor as well as a hipped and pitched roof above the first floor addition. The proposed dwelling would have a GEA of around 234sqm.
7. Policy DM14 of the LPP2 sets out that for development outside settlement boundaries an increase in floorspace by 40% or more will normally be considered disproportionate. However, the property is within a settlement boundary and therefore this would not apply. Consequently, there is no definition as to what constitutes disproportionate, indeed, I am provided with decisions¹ where different approaches are taken which range from a 61% to 104% increase in floorspace.
8. Nevertheless, I have taken into account the specific circumstances of this case, including the increased floorspace but also the increased mass and scale from the original building which includes both the bulk at ground and first floor but also at roof level. Consequently, the proposed development would result in substantial extensions from the original building. Taken together, the increase in floorspace, scale and massing comprise a significant addition to the property. This results in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
9. Therefore, for the reasons described above, the appeal scheme is inappropriate development in the Green Belt both in the terms of the Framework and Policies RE2 of the LPP1 and DM14 of the LPP2 the aims of which are set out above.

¹ 11 Peakfield LPA ref WA/2022/02862, 6 St Marys Cottages LPA ref: WA/2018/1909, 29 Peakfield LPA ref WA/2021/0429, Old Quarry House Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/W/18/3202309

Openness

10. The proposed two storey side extension would result in a significant increase of built form and massing to this site and introduces development into areas where there was previously none. The two storey side extension would be clearly seen from the street to the front and the side, as well as from adjoining properties. Whilst wider views to the front would be screened by properties opposite, the side elevation would be visible. This would result in harm to spatial and visual openness.
11. The outbuilding is proposed to be removed which would improve the openness at the rear of the site. However, the scale and mass of the proposed extension would be greater than the outbuilding and there would not be a cumulative reduction in development. It would also be sited in a more prominent position. As such any benefits to openness at the rear part of the site would be offset by the greater harm to openness in the area adjacent to the existing house.
12. The appellant also proposes that future permitted development rights could be controlled by condition. Whilst this could prevent any additional increase in built form which may be further harmful to openness, this would not overcome the harm from the extension as proposed.
13. Consequently, for the reasons above, the proposed development is harmful to the openness of the Green Belt. Therefore, it is contrary to the Framework in this regard.

Character and Appearance

14. The site is within the Surrey Hills National Landscape (formerly the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) which is of national importance due to its natural beauty. I am mindful of the statutory duty to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape. I give great weight to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty in this area, and this has the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.
15. Peakfield is a residential street, surrounded by open countryside. No 15 is part of a group of properties along Peakfield comprised of pairs of semi detached dwellings. The front elevations include a front gable projecting forward from the main bulk of the dwelling. The broadly consistent appearance of the pairs results in a pleasant sense of symmetry. Whilst there are extensions to other properties in the street including nos 18 and 29 these are not so common as to form an overriding part of the character and appearance of the area.
16. The proposed eaves level and roof pitch would match the existing dwelling, with an area of flat roof above resulting in a lower overall ridge line. The arrangement of the proposed front first floor windows would reflect those on the existing property. The front elevation would align with the main bulk of the dwelling, however the covered porch would project forward from this, albeit not as far as the front gable. The ground floor would extend for the full depth of the building, with the first floor lesser in depth and the extended dwelling would occupy the majority of the width of the plot.

17. The design of the roof form, along with the depth of the proposed extension, which would not be set back from the main bulk of the house, would not appear secondary to the existing dwelling. It would therefore result in development which would be dominant in this context. Furthermore, it would unacceptably unbalance this pair of dwellings and harmfully erode the important sense of symmetry in this location. This would remain the case if the outbuilding were demolished. The extension would be highly visible in the streetscene, as well as from parts of the surrounding open countryside as set out above. Therefore, this dominant, developed feature would also be harmful to the natural beauty of the National Landscape in this regard.
18. As such, the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area including the Surrey Hills National Landscape. Consequently, it would be contrary to policies TD1 of the LPP1 and DM1 and DM4 of the LPP2. Together these require high quality design which should not cause harm to areas of landscape value, amongst other things. As well as the advice in the Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Document (2010) which provides detail with regard to two storey side extensions including that they should appear smaller in mass or scale or be subordinate to the existing house.

Very Special Circumstances

19. The appeal scheme proposes the removal of the outbuilding. However, even taking this into account, the proposed development would still be harmful with regard to openness for the reasons set out above.
20. The proposed development would result in temporary economic benefits during construction. The extension would be better insulated than the outbuilding, which could result in a reduction in energy usage. It would also create an additional living space for existing occupiers with space for home working, albeit this would mainly be a private benefit. As such, taking these matters into consideration along with the scale of the appeal proposed, the benefits of the appeal scheme would be minor.
21. My attention is drawn to other development where extensions have been permitted in the Green Belt. The applications at 11 and 29 Peakfield consider extensions in the same position as existing conservatories to be replaced. At 6 St Mary's Cottages the extension was considered not to be disproportionate and the replacement of outbuildings was considered separately. The appeal decision at Old Quarry House is located some way from the appeal site where the character and appearance differ. Furthermore, the decision states that the proposed development would not extend the built form of the dwelling beyond the envelope of the existing. Therefore, the circumstances of these cases are clearly different to that before me now.

Green Belt Balance

22. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. Paragraph 153 of the Framework states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. I have found harm to the Green Belt by reason of the proposed development's inappropriateness. There is also harm to the Green Belt due to the effect on openness. As well as harm to the character and appearance of the area including the nationally important Surrey Hills National

Landscape. The considerations advanced by the appellant, even when considered together, do not clearly outweigh the totality of the harm.

23. The very special circumstances necessary to justify the development therefore do not exist. Therefore, the proposed development conflicts with paragraph 153 of the Framework and Policy RE2 of the LPP1, the aims of which are set out above.

Conclusion

24. The proposal does not accord with the development plan and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, to indicate that the appeal should be determined otherwise. Therefore, for the reasons given above, I conclude that this appeal should be dismissed.

H Miles

INSPECTOR