
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 September 2024

by C Hall BSc MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 October 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/G2245/D/24/3345910

2 Singles Cross Cottages, The Willows, Blueberry Lane, Knockholt TN14 7NH

- 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 Osenton against the decision of Sevenoaks District Council.
 - The application reference is 23/03541/HOUSE.
 - The proposal is for demolition/dismantling of existing shed; erection of single storey side extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the demolition/dismantling of existing shed; erection of single storey side extension at 2 Singles Cross Cottages, The Willows, Blueberry Lane, Knockholt TN14 7NH in accordance with the terms of the application reference 23/03541/HOUSE subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 3081 (20) 002, 3081 (20) 003 Rev B, 3081 (20) 004, 3081 (02) 1250 Rev A, 3081 (20) 1250 Rev A and outbuilding removal plan (REP-01).
 - 3) The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building.
 - 4) No development above the damp proof course shall be carried out to the extension hereby approved, until the existing buildings (half of shed to rear of the site and tool sheds 1 and 2), have been demolished and all resulting materials removed from the site, in accordance with the outbuilding removal plan (REP-01) and proposed ground and first floor plan (3081 (20) 002).

Preliminary Matter

2. My attention has been drawn to the extensive planning history of the site, including planning permission reference 23/02284/HOUSE, approved in October 2023. Also a previous appeal on the site was dismissed in September 2021 (Planning Inspectorate reference APP/G2245/D/21/3271754). I shall have regard to this background when considering the merits of this proposal.

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 (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies;
- the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt; 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. The appeal site comprises a two-storey, detached house with off-street parking on the driveway to the front. It is situated on the peripherals of the village of Knockholt, with the wider area being countryside of fields and woodland.
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. The Framework defines the date of an 'original building' as 1 July 1948, or as originally built if constructed after that date. Policy GB1 of the Sevenoaks Allocations and Development Management Plan 2015 ('the ADMP') is broadly consistent with the Framework in this respect.
7. The Framework does not define what constitutes a disproportionate addition. Policy GB1 states, amongst other things, that the total floor space of the proposal, together with any previous extensions, alterations and outbuildings should not result in an increase of more than 50% above the floor space of the original dwelling (measured externally) including outbuildings within 5m of the dwelling.
8. The Council puts forward a figure of some 141% uplift for the cumulative external floor space increase when one adds the appeal scheme to previous works to the original home. This figure is not disputed by the appellant. With a change from an original home of around 107 m² to the proposal now leading to about 258 m³, I find it impossible to reach a view other than there would be a failure of the 'disproportionate additions' test.
9. Judging the scheme in accordance with Policy GB1, I consider that the proposed extension, together with the previous additions to the dwelling, 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. Consequently, there would be conflict with Policy GB1 of the ADMP.

Openness

10. The Framework makes it clear that an essential characteristic of Green Belts is their openness. Open can mean the absence of development irrespective of the degree of visibility of the site from public vantage points; development which would harm openness could be acceptable visually. In other words, openness of the Green Belt has a spatial aspect as well as a visual aspect and the absence of visual intrusion does not in itself mean that there is no impact on the openness of the Green Belt as a result of development.
11. In this case, the proposal would involve the addition of considerable built form. By occupying an area that is currently undeveloped, the addition would inevitably reduce the spatial openness of the site. Overall, I find the element would have a modest, but nonetheless clearly discernible effect on the openness of the Green Belt.

Other considerations

12. The scheme approved under application 23/02284/HOUSE is, to all intents and purposes, the same scale and height as that now proposed by this appeal. The only differences are that the extension would comprise matching materials to the main dwelling, and the inclusion of an internal doorway allowing for access into the host property. Taking a pragmatic approach, I am satisfied that there would be no adverse impacts in Green Belt terms above and beyond that which has already been permitted, with the use of matching materials being an improvement having regard to the character and appearance of the dwelling.

Green Belt Balance

13. I am required by the Framework to give substantial weight to the harm the extension causes to the Green Belt by virtue of its inappropriateness and to openness. However, I consider that the other considerations in this case clearly outweigh this harm. Looking at matters as a whole, I am of the view that very special circumstances exist which justify the proposal.

Conditions

14. I have considered the imposition of conditions in light of advice in Planning Policy Guidance and the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition to the standard implementation condition, the approved plans are listed for certainty. A condition requiring external materials to match those on the existing dwelling would provide for a satisfactory appearance, and one requiring removal of the existing sheds would accord with the 23/02284/HOUSE in ensuring the protection of the openness of the Green Belt.

Conclusion

15. Having regard to all issues put forward and my reasoning above, I allow the appeal.

C Hall

INSPECTOR