



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 October 2024

by B Phillips BSc MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/D/24/3341006

Sisyphus School Lane, Shackleford, Godalming GU8 6AZ

- 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 Mark Ford against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/P/02013.
 - The development proposed is alterations to the roof.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. In November 2023, the National Landscapes Association reported that all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) had become National Landscapes. However, the Framework continues to refer to them as AONBs. In this decision I have used the term AONB, consistent with the evidence and the Framework. The legal designation and policy status of such areas is unaffected, whichever term is used.

Main Issues

3. The appeal site is located within an area of Green Belt. Accordingly, the main issues are:
 - whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and 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 existing dwelling; and
 - if the development would be inappropriate, whether the harm to the Green Belt by way of inappropriateness and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify it.

Reasons

Whether Inappropriate Development

4. The Framework states that the construction of new buildings is to be regarded as inappropriate development subject to the exceptions which are set out in paragraph 154. Part c) of this paragraph lists 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, as one such exception.

5. Policy P2 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan: Strategy and Sites (2019) (LP) confirms that Green Belt policy will be applied in line with the Framework.
6. The appellant assesses the original floor area of the property to be 96.2m², with existing extensions resulting in an increase in floor area over the original building of approximately 75%.
7. Neither LP Policy P2 nor the Framework define the term materially larger. However, even if I accepted these figures, an increase of this magnitude of the floor space or floor area of the original property is significant and would amount to a substantial increase in the form, bulk and overall scale and size of the original building.
8. Whilst not resulting in additional floor space, the proposed development would add some 16 cubic metres of volume. This would further add to the already substantial increase in form, bulk and scale of the original dwelling, and given the existing scale of additions, must also be considered disproportionate over the original dwelling size.
9. In light of the above I conclude that the proposal would comprise a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building and would result in inappropriate development in the Green Belt, in conflict with LP Policy P2 and Paragraph 154 of the Framework as set out above.

Openness

10. The Framework makes it clear that openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt.
11. The proposal would increase the massing of the roof form. Whilst this would be a modest increase in scale, there would therefore be some spatial impact upon openness.
12. The development would result in an alteration to the side roof form from a hip to a gablet design. This would add to the massing of this part of the roof and be visible from the front and the highway, albeit, only in glimpses through the roadside vegetation.
13. There would be therefore a visual impact upon openness, in addition to the spatial impact that would result, and openness would be reduced. Modest harm to openness would therefore occur.

Character and appearance

14. The existing property is a sizable, detached dwelling, and whilst it evidently has been extensively extended, it retains a coherent design with a large, pitched roof central gable on both front and rear elevations, with modest pitched roof dormers on either side at the rear, and on one side to the front. The consistency in the roof form when viewed from the front and rear contributes positively to its harmonious character.
15. As set out above, the proposal would result in an alteration to the appearance of the roof form of the side projection. In addition, the existing modest pitched roof rear dormer would be extended to result in a sizable flat roof extension.

16. The additions would not increase the ridge height of this part of the roof and save for the gabled roof form, would be mostly hidden from public views. However, the incongruous rear flat roof element would appear at odds with the surrounding pitched roof forms and would appear as an unsympathetic, bulky addition which would unbalance the rear elevation. The use of matching materials would not mitigate for the visual impact of the form and scale of the unsympathetic addition, which would detract from the existing coherent design and character of the dwelling.
17. The proposal would therefore have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the existing dwelling. It would be contrary to LP Policy D1 and Policies D4 and H4 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan: Development Management Policies (2023) (DM), which collectively require, amongst other matters, high quality design that takes into account the form and proportions of the existing building. There is also conflict with the high quality design goals of the Framework. There would also be conflict with the advice set out in the supplementary planning document Residential Extensions and Alterations (2018), which sets out that flat roofs will generally be resisted.

Other Matters

18. The appeal site sits within the Surrey Hills AONB and an Area of Great Landscape Value. Little information is provided as to the reason for designation and special qualities of the AONB and Area of Great Landscape Value. However, given the self-contained nature of the appeal property, with significant screening on three sides, with nearby residential properties of differing character, it makes little positive contribution to the wider landscape at present.
19. Given the limited scale of the proposal and the lack of visibility of the proposed extension (other than in glimpses from the front, as set out above), I am satisfied that the proposal would not harm the wider landscape qualities of the AONB and Area of Great Landscape Value. It is noteworthy that the Council found similarly in this regard.

Other Considerations

20. The proposal would result in the improvement in accommodation, specifically providing additional head height to more of a bedroom. Whilst this would not be uncommon to dwellings of some age, the appellant sets out that the additional head room would bring the room up to Nationally Described Space Standards. As such, I give this benefit some moderate weight.
21. The appellant refers to development allowed nearby in the Green Belt¹, however whilst limited information is provided, it appears that these schemes are substantial in scale where significant benefits and very special circumstances demonstrated. This is not the case for the proposal before me and as such, the examples are not directly comparable.
22. The appellant points to a fall-back option of a permitted development outbuilding. Whilst potentially significantly larger than the proposed development, there is no definitive information before me to suggest that such a development would be permitted development, and in any case, the drawing

¹ Reference WA/2015/0789 (Erection of 69 new dwellings and a 60 bed care home) WA/2012/0710 & 12/P/00767 (Erection of 18 dwellings)

provided does not show that the same type of accommodation – additional bedroom space, would be provided.

23. As such, even if permission/lawful development certificate was gained, in this instance I do not find that there is a realistic prospect of the fall-back being implemented. For these reasons, I have given the fall-back position only limited weight in favour of the proposal.
24. The removal of permitted development rights would not prevent nor mitigate for the harm identified; it would only prevent potential further harm. As such, even if such a condition met the tests in the Framework, it would not represent a benefit in favour of the proposal.
25. A fundamental aim of Green Belts is to keep land permanently open. As set out above, there would be some harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Even if the proposal would not conflict with the five purposes of the Green Belt as set out by the Framework, this is a neutral factor not in favour of the proposal, as an assessment of the proposal against the five purposes of the Green Belt is not a matter that affects the consideration as to whether it is inappropriate or not.

Green Belt balance and conclusion

26. The Framework is clear that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
27. I have found that the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. In addition, it would result in a loss of openness to the Green Belt. Substantial weight is given to the harm to the Green Belt in accordance with paragraph 153 of the Framework. Given the importance given to high quality design set out by the Framework, the harm to the character and appearance of the existing dwelling and conflict with LP Policy D1 and DM Policies D4 and H4 also carries significant weight.
28. I have given some weight to the factors in favour of the proposal, and conclude that, taken together, they do not clearly outweigh the harm arising from the proposal. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt do not exist.
29. The proposed development would not accord with LP Policy P2 or the framework in relation to the Green Belt. There are no other considerations which outweigh these findings. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

B Phillips

INSPECTOR