



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 November 2024

by C Carpenter BA MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29th November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/M3645/D/24/3341875

55 Dome Hill, Caterham, Surrey CR3 6EF

- 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 A Raby against the decision of Tandridge District Council.
 - The application Ref is 2023/1380.
 - The development proposed is demolition of garage, rear conservatory and outbuilding and erection of two-storey side addition and ground floor rear extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. On 30 July 2024 the Government published a consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and other changes to the planning system. The proposed revisions to the Framework are draft and therefore may be subject to change before the final Framework is published. Moreover, the draft revisions to the Framework and other proposed reforms are not directly relevant to this appeal. Therefore, I am satisfied no party would be disadvantaged by not having the opportunity to comment on them.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - i. whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework and any relevant development plan policies;
 - ii. the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - iii. the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the existing building and surrounding area; and
 - iv. 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. Paragraph 154 of the Framework states the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate subject to exceptions. These include 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. Policies DP10 and DP13 of the Tandridge Local Plan Part 2: Detailed Policies 2014 (TLP2) are broadly consistent with the Framework.

5. 'Original building' is defined in the Framework as a building as it existed on 1 July 1948. TLP2 Policy DP13 uses the later date of 31 December 1968 for residential buildings. The extent to which a detached structure might form part of the original building is a matter of fact and degree.
6. A Land Registry plan dated 1939 shows the house and a detached garage, which has a smaller footprint than the current garage. The plan appears to show a wall linking the garage to the house. This, and a functional connection, indicate the original, smaller, garage was an adjunct to the dwelling. I therefore find the un-extended garage was part of the original building.
7. In addition to the garage extension, No 55 now has an attached lean-to, carport and conservatory, and a detached 'studio'. There is no pertinent evidence to demonstrate any of these structures was built before 31 December 1968. Consequently, I find they are not part of the original building. Further, the studio is an ancillary outbuilding within the curtilage of the main dwelling, so does not fall to be considered as an original building in its own right.
8. Both floor area and volume are helpful metrics in assessing whether the proposed additions would be proportionate relative to the size of the original building.
9. The plans before me suggest the depth of the un-extended garage was about two thirds that of the current structure. As noted, it also did not include the area of the current lean-to or carport. The floor area of the original building, including the original garage, was therefore somewhat larger than the approximate 124m² of the main dwellinghouse. However, I am not persuaded on the evidence before me that the floor area and volume of the original building were as high as 190m² and 517m³ respectively, as those figures appear to include more than just the house and garage without extensions.
10. The proposed development would result in a total floor area of approximately 254m² and, by the appellant's calculation, a total volume of 778.9m³.
11. I therefore estimate the percentage increase in both floor area and volume would be substantially greater than 40 per cent. I find this would amount to a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building.
12. For the above reasons, I conclude the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, contrary to Framework paragraph 154c) and TLP2 Policies DP10 and DP13.

Openness

13. Openness can be perceived spatially and visually. The proposed two-storey extension would reduce spatial openness by introducing built form into the undeveloped void above the current single storey garage. There are generous and open views of the wooded escarpments that lie behind the street on both sides, currently visible in both directions above the single storey garage and outbuilding. The proposed two-storey structure would greatly inhibit these views from both the street and No 55's rear garden, thereby also curtailing visual openness. Overall, the harm to openness would be considerable.

Character and appearance

14. Dome Hill is predominantly characterised by large, detached houses of varied, traditional appearance. The mainly rectangular plots are generous and deep, giving the neighbourhood a spacious character. No 55 sits comfortably within its site, with substantial gaps to either side providing clear separation from the neighbouring dwellings, notwithstanding the presence of garages. This layout contributes to the spacious feel of the street.
15. The existing house has three distinct elements when viewed from the front. The middle section is differentiated by its half-timbered gable and 'portrait' window above the front door. To either side of this are principal and subsidiary wings, unified in appearance by their tiled hipped roofs and horizontal fenestration. This form and design, reinforced by the staggered front building line, give the dwelling a pleasing sense of balance and proportion. The single storey garage and linking wall/gate are clearly subservient and do not compete with the appearance of the house.
16. The proposed two-storey side extension would add a fourth section to the house broadly equivalent in proportions to the current principal wing when viewed from the front. The extension would not be set back or down from the host dwelling, so would be a bulky and dominant addition that would upset the balance and proportions of the house and undermine the integrity of its design. Articulation of the mass through use of a valley gutter would do little to mitigate this discordant effect.
17. As noted above, the two-storey side extension would also greatly reduce the perception of space and separation between the appeal premises and its neighbour, such that No 55 would appear cramped and lop-sided on its plot. This would erode the spacious character of the neighbourhood, notwithstanding a degree of screening from boundary treatments.
18. Matching materials could be secured via condition were the appeal to be allowed, but this would not overcome the deleterious effect of the proposal on the scale and form of the host property and resulting detriment to the street scene. There is little to substantiate the suggestion that the form and scale of the scheme would be of similar proportions to other extensions on Dome Hill, particularly bearing in mind the variety of house design in the street and the need to consider every proposal on its individual merits.
19. For the above reasons, I conclude the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the existing building and surrounding area. The degree of harm would be considerable. This is contrary to Policy CSP18 of the Tandridge District Core Strategy 2008, TLP2 Policy DP7 and Policies CCW4 and CCW5 of the Caterham, Chaldon and Whyteleafe Neighbourhood Plan 2021. Together, these Policies seek, among other things, high quality design that respects and contributes to the distinctive character and appearance of the area and integrates well with the surroundings.

Other considerations

20. The appellant has referred to their permitted development rights as a potential fall-back position, but I have seen little to suggest they would genuinely pursue this option if the appeal failed or that such a scheme would be similar to, or worse than, what is currently proposed. As such, it is a matter of little weight.

21. I have considered the permissions for extensions to Nos 1 and 57 Dome Hill brought to my attention¹. In the case of No 1, a lawful development certificate had been granted for development of similar size, height and design to that proposed. In the case of No 57, the proposed development was found to represent a better alternative to the established fall-back position. Moreover, in neither case was harm to character and appearance identified. Consequently, the circumstances in those cases are not directly comparable to those before me, and I ascribe them little weight.
22. There would be an economic benefit from construction, but this would attract only limited weight given the modest scale of the proposal.
23. The Council has raised no concern with the effect of the proposal on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. However, an absence of harm in this regard does not carry positive weight in favour of the development.

Green Belt Balance

24. 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. I also give considerable weight to the harm I have found to character and appearance. Individually or cumulatively, the weights I have attached to other considerations do not clearly outweigh these harms. Consequently, the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.

Conclusion

25. I have found the proposal conflicts with the development plan, read as a whole. No other material considerations, including the Framework, have been shown to indicate that a decision should be made otherwise than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

C Carpenter

INSPECTOR

¹ References TA/2023/74 and TA/2020/2101