
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 August 2025

by **A Oyebade MSc FCILT**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th January 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/P1750/W/24/3355500

Tranquillity Keep, Ridgemead Road, Englefield Green, Surrey TW20 0YD

- 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 Paul Solari against the decision of Runnymede Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is RU.23/1257.
 - The development proposed is erection of a new two-storey 5-bedroom detached residential dwelling and a detached triple garage following the demolition of the existing detached residential dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

2. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and any relevant development plan policies;
 - the effect on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - the effect on the mature tree on the appeal site and protected species in the area;
 - the effect on flood risk in the locality; and
 - whether the harm arising by reason of inappropriateness, together with any other identified harm, would be clearly outweighed by other material considerations to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposed development.

Reasons

Appropriateness of the development proposal in a Green Belt

3. Paragraph 154 of the Framework sets out among others the pertinent category of development which may be regarded as not inappropriate in the Green Belt as:
 - the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces.
4. Policy EE14 of the Runnymede Local Plan (adopted July 2020) is consistent with the provisions of the Framework insofar as it permits the replacement of a building within the Green Belt, subject to the requirement that the replacement structure is

for the same use and is not materially larger than that which it replaces. The policy further stipulates that any such development must not result in a material intensification of the site's visual prominence. In all circumstances, proposals are required to safeguard the openness of the Green Belt and to ensure that they do not conflict with the fundamental purposes of including land within it.

5. The appeal site is located on a residential road predominantly characterised by large detached houses, both single and two-storey, set within generous plots. The street features a mix of a few flats alongside early 20th-century historic buildings. Consistent with many of the larger properties along this road, the existing bungalow on the appeal site is positioned well back within its plot, screened by substantial boundary hedges including a large mature tree on one side of its entrance. This layout creates an expansive landscaped frontage between the dwelling and the road, with tall hedges defining the boundary. The arrangement provides a soft, natural transition from the landscaped area and adjoining vegetation into the wider skyline, reinforcing the sense of openness within the courtyard setting.
6. Furthermore, many properties along this road, particularly bungalows such as that on the appeal site, are largely concealed by tall, dense hedges. As a result, they remain inconspicuous when viewed from the street until their gated entrances are reached, at which point they become more visible. By contrast, a small number of two-storey dwellings are positioned closer to the boundary hedges. Despite the screening provided by hedges and mature trees, these taller buildings remain partially visible from the road.
7. The proposal involves demolishing the existing dwelling and replacing it with a significantly larger five-bedroom house. While the submitted plans indicate that the new building would sit slightly further back from the boundary hedges along Ridgemean Road, its overall footprint would nonetheless increase from 337m² to 415m², an uplift of around 23%. As noted in the Council's statement, the proposed development would result in a gross floor area of 805m², more than twice that (337m²) of the current dwelling. This substantial increase in size and massing would markedly alter the site, undermine its spacious character and disrupt the established balance between built form and landscaped setting that contributes to the street's distinctive appearance.
8. The appellant submits that no definition has been provided of the term "materially larger," and further notes that the legacy benchmark of 30% contained in the previous Local Plan does not form part of the current Development Plan policies. It is accepted that the Development Plan does not specify a numerical threshold. However, the appeal proposal, which involves significant increase in footprint and overall massing, would result in a building that is materially larger than the existing structure it seeks to replace. The difference in scale between the existing and proposed development is illustrated in the submitted elevation. This shows the replacement dwelling positioned noticeably above the boundary hedges, whereas the existing dwelling is largely screened by them.
9. The appellant contends that the proposal should be considered within the scope of paragraph 154(g) of the Framework, on the basis that it represents a complete redevelopment of previously developed land, subject to the requirement that it does not result in substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. The principal consideration is the extent of any impact on openness. This assessment forms part

of the overall evaluation of harm to the Green Belt and is addressed in the reasoning set out below.

Effect on the openness of the Green Belt

10. A fundamental aim of the Green Belt policy, as set out in paragraph 142 of the Framework, is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt that has spatial and visual aspects.
11. The elevation plan clearly demonstrates that the appeal proposal would rise substantially above the neighbouring bungalow, Still Meadow, and far exceed the height of the existing dwelling on the site. This disproportionate scale is reinforced by the street-scene plan, which shows the entire first floor and roof of the proposed building projecting conspicuously above the established hedge line. In stark contrast, only the uppermost portions of the existing dwelling and Still Meadow are glimpsed above the hedges, their modest rooflines blending unobtrusively into the landscape.
12. The existing property benefits from a distinctly open and softly landscaped frontage incorporating a large mature tree, framed by boundary hedges and interrupted only by a modest access route to its integral garage. Importantly, there is no formal forecourt parking provision, allowing the landscaped setting to remain dominant. In marked disparity, the appeal proposal introduces a large triple garage with preceding driveway parking area prominently positioned to one side of the frontage. These additions would overwhelm the open character of the plot, disrupting the established rhythm of low-lying buildings that are typically softened by mature vegetation and generous courtyard openness.
13. The sheer bulk and height of the proposed building would be immediately visible from the street, creating a visually intrusive and disproportionate presence that erodes the carefully balanced transition between landscaped frontage and skyline. While the visual dimension is not the sole determinant of openness, I consider it to be a relevant factor in this case. In addition, I concur with the Council that the proposed development would be materially larger spatially than the one it replaces. Consequently, the development would cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Accordingly, the proposal would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt and not therefore accord with Policy EE14 of the Local Plan and the Framework, as explained above.

Effect on the mature tree on the appeal site and protected species in the area

14. The Council has determined that the documentation submitted in respect of the proposed works within the Root Protection Area (RPA) of the Red Oak tree is inadequate to demonstrate that the long-term health, structural integrity, and overall vitality of the specimen would be safeguarded. In addition, the Council asserts that the introduction of a driveway near the RPA would impose undue stress upon the tree's root system. Given the recognised propensity of Red Oak trees to shed limbs, the Council further contends that such circumstances would inevitably generate pressure for post-development pruning to mitigate perceived risks, thereby compounding the adverse impact upon the tree.
15. The appellant has submitted a tree report encompassing relevant tree protection plan, and the Council has identified a relevant condition referencing British

Standard 3998:2010 Tree Work: Recommendations, to be applied should the appeal be allowed. I am satisfied that an updated tree report, capable of meeting the requirements of Condition 8, would adequately address this matter and therefore remove the need for refusal on this ground.

16. The appeal site is located within the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. In this context, the Council consulted the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWLT). SWLT's response sought further information, including clarification of the evidence used to classify the bat roost, ecological justification for the appellant's methodology, and additional survey work to establish the presence or likely absence of great crested newts.
17. Policy EE9 of the Runnymede Local Plan empowers the Council to secure net gains in biodiversity through the creation, restoration, enhancement, and management of habitats and features, with the aim of improving the condition of priority habitats and species. Policy EE11 requires that development proposals avoid further fragmentation of Green Infrastructure and encourages schemes that restore, maintain, and enhance habitat connectivity.
18. I note that the Council did not seek further information from the appellant, on the basis that it considered there to be no reasonable prospect of the proposal being approved. However, this does not, in my view, remove the appellant's obligations under the relevant policies. In the absence of a mitigation strategy, I am unable to conclude with certainty that adequate measures have been proposed to avoid harm to the Special Protection Area. Accordingly, the development would conflict with Policies EE9 and EE11 of the Local Plan.

Effect on flood risk in the locality

19. Policy EE13 of the Runnymede Local Plan stipulates that all proposed development must attenuate surface water run-off such that post-development discharge rates do not exceed those prevailing prior to development. In circumstances where the site is previously developed, proposals are required to actively reduce both run-off rates and volumes. Furthermore, the policy requires that sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) be employed in the management of surface water unless it is demonstrably inappropriate to do so. The Council observes that the site is not situated within an area of fluvial flood risk. Accordingly, I find that the principal flood risk arising from development at this location would be attributable to surface water run-off.
20. The appellant has adduced evidence indicating that surface water run-off, calculated at 72.11m³ inclusive of a 1:100 year storm event plus a 45% climate change allowance, would not exceed the run-off associated with the existing dwelling. Although the Council accepts this conclusion, it nonetheless seeks further detailed specifications to ensure that the proposed drainage system includes an appropriate maintenance regime, including measures to secure its self-cleansing function and minimise the risk of blockages. As these additional requirements can be secured by way of a planning condition, I am satisfied that the proposal would comply with Policy EE13 of the Local Plan.
21. The Council further contends that the appellant's submission in respect of surface water drainage is deficient, in that it lacks sufficient technical detail to establish compliance with the discharge hierarchy. It has not been shown that all practicable options have been fully investigated and discounted prior to reliance upon the least

sustainable option, namely discharge to the public foul/combined sewer. The appellant's Surface Water Drainage Strategy (April 2024) records that the design was prepared in accordance with the CIRIA C753 hierarchy. On that basis, I am satisfied that any residual requirements in relation to this aspect of the assessment could appropriately be secured by means of a planning condition.

22. The Council also asserts that two additional infiltration tests within the rear garden, required to ascertain the feasibility of infiltration at that location, have not been undertaken. The appellant's Surface Water Drainage Strategy (April 2024) confirms that infiltration testing was undertaken in accordance with BRE365, utilising two trial pits. As no soil infiltration rates could be derived, the site was deemed practically impermeable and unsuitable for infiltration SuDS. I therefore consider that any outstanding requirements pertaining to this element of the assessment could likewise be addressed by way of a planning condition.

Other considerations

23. A dwelling on the site would contribute to employment during its construction.

Conclusion

24. Paragraph 153 of the Framework makes clear that any harm to the Green Belt, particularly to its openness, must be afforded substantial weight in the decision-making process. Inappropriate development is inherently harmful to the Green Belt and should only be permitted in the most exceptional of circumstances. Such "very special circumstances" will only arise where the harm caused by inappropriateness, together with any other adverse impacts of the proposal, is convincingly and demonstrably outweighed by other material considerations. In this case, the scale of harm to openness is substantial, and no compelling justification has been advanced that could override the strong presumption against the development in the Green Belt.
25. I give little weight to the contribution that the proposal would make to local employment. Therefore, the substantial weight to be given to the Green Belt harm is not clearly outweighed by the other considerations as to denote very special circumstances.
26. For the reasons given above, the appeal should be dismissed.

A Oyebade

INSPECTOR