



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 February 2026

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16th February 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/D/25/3376771

1 Bridge Cottages, Sandridgebury Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 6JE

- 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 and Mrs Gilbert against the decision of St Albans City Council.
 - The application Ref is 5/25/1551.
 - The development proposed is 'two storey side extension and single storey rear extension, following demolition of single storey side extension'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - i) whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt; and
 - ii) if the development would be inappropriate, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify it.

Reasons

Green Belt

3. The appeal relates to a semi-detached dwelling which is located within the Green Belt. The National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') advises that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate, unless specified exceptions apply. These exceptions include the extension of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
4. Saved Policy 1 of the City and District of St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994 ('the LPR') defines the Green Belt and states that permission will not be given for development for purposes other than those which it lists unless very special circumstances exist. It does not refer specifically to extensions, but Policy 13 of the LPR notes that extensions in the Green Belt may be permitted unless the scale or visual impact upon the building as originally constructed would create a building of significantly larger or different character. These policies pre-date and are not wholly consistent with the terms of the Framework, but in these respects, they conform broadly to the thrust of national Green Belt policy.

5. The Framework does not define 'disproportionate additions', but some local guidance is provided by the Council's Residential Extensions and Replacement Dwellings in the Green Belt Supplementary Planning Guidance 2004 ('the SPG') which outlines a number of criteria that proposals for residential extensions will be assessed against.
6. Of these criteria, (i) provides that for side and rear extensions, an increase in volume of between 90m³ and 180m³, or an increase in floorspace of between 20% and 40% (subject to a maximum increase in the cubic content of 300m³) may be acceptable. At (ii), the SPG indicates that the cumulative impact of any previous and proposed extensions will be assessed.
7. The appellants have not disputed the Council's assessment indicating that the proposal along with previous extensions would far exceed the guidelines advocated by the SPG for both volume and floorspace increases, even in cases where a proposal otherwise performs well against the other SPG criteria.
8. Furthermore, the plans indicate that the two-storey part of the side extension would be of greater total depth, similar height and of only slightly lesser width than the original dwelling. It would also have a pitched roof with gable end to the side. Although it may be set back from the main front elevation and set in relative to the existing single-storey side projection, its considerable bulk and mass would in my view appear as a large and disproportionate addition to the dwelling.
9. On that basis, I find that the proposal would amount to a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original dwelling, and a building which is significantly larger. The proposal would not therefore meet the terms of the exception specified in the Framework, and it would be contrary to Policy 13 of the LPR.
10. In reaching this view, I note applications for a single storey rear extension and a first-floor side extension to the adjoining dwelling at 2 Bridge Cottages which were approved. However, while permission may have been granted after the inception of Green Belt policy, the applications appear to pre-date the guidance in the SPG, and the full circumstances and relevant considerations which led to the approvals is further unclear to me from the very limited details provided. The appellants have also referred to other local examples of extensions which they suggest would exceed the SPG guidelines, but substantive details have not been provided and it is consequently unclear that circumstances would be directly comparable to the appeal proposal. The weight that I can give to these developments is therefore limited and they do not alter my assessment that the appeal proposal would be disproportionate to and significantly larger than the original building.
11. Turning to the other criteria within the SPG, (iii) relates to the type of extension and includes comment that two storey side extensions can often have a detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt and may therefore be resisted, while (iv) indicates that the position of extensions in relation to public viewpoints will be a material factor for consideration.
12. In this case, the two-storey side extension would sit between the dwelling and a raised embankment to the railway line. While there is currently a single-storey projection on this part of the site, it is of modest height with a flat roof which maintains a degree of openness and views through the site at higher level. The side extension now proposed would be less wide than the existing projection and so would not extend into wholly open land or beyond the established curtilage.

Even so, it would be of comparable height to the dwelling and would add considerable bulk and mass to the side of the building. Although it would be set back and vegetation could provide some screening, this would not be complete and based on my observations, the extension would be clearly apparent in public views from Sandridgebury Lane. In these views and irrespective of its domestic character, the much greater physical presence of the development would obstruct some higher level views through the site and the existing impression of openness here would be notably diminished. The development may be experienced from only a comparatively small area and so effects would be relatively limited and localised, but there would accordingly be some harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

13. Insofar as the proposed extensions would occupy space to the rear of the dwelling or between the dwelling and the railway with open land beyond, the provisions at (v) of the SPG which relate to extensions in gaps between dwellings would not be directly applicable. Nevertheless, this does not alter my finding above that the side extension would result in harm to openness.
14. The Council does not argue that the proposal would fail to address the requirements of saved Policy 72 of the LPR as sought by criterion (vi) of the SPG. From my observations and the evidence before me, I have no firm reason to find differently. Given the relationship of the proposal to existing landscaping features and that the site is not part of a conservation area or listed building, I also agree with the Council that the criteria at (vii) and (viii) of the SPG which relate to landscaping and tree preservation and conservation areas and listed buildings are not directly applicable.
15. For the reasons above however, I conclude that the proposal would be inappropriate development which the Framework states is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and which should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The proposal would additionally cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

Other Considerations

16. The appellants assert that the proposal would result in the dwelling matching 2 Bridge Cottages in form and design, and an enhancement relative to the design of the large flat roof section to the side of the dwelling. However, while No 2 does have a two-storey side projection, I saw that this is set down relative to the host dwelling and that it has a hipped roof form whereas the side extension before me would be of comparable height to the host dwelling and would have a pitched roof with gable to the side. Although the contrast in their relative massing may be reduced, the overall form and design of the pair would accordingly remain somewhat unbalanced rather than symmetrical. In addition, the flat roof to the side of the appeal dwelling is of reasonable width, but the visual impact of this feature is tempered by its modest height and I did not find it to be a prominent or obtrusive element against the building or in the wider area.
17. Moreover, Bridge Cottages are set apart from any other residential development. Their appearance and the flat roof to the appeal dwelling do not therefore stand out against any locally distinctive character and based on my observations, the existing form and appearance of the pair does not detract to any meaningful degree from the character and appearance of the area.

18. I am satisfied that the design and materials of the development would in themselves be appropriately sympathetic to the host building. Having regard to the context above however, I am not persuaded that the proposal would result in significant enhancement to the character or appearance of Bridge Cottages, the Sandridgebury Lane street scene or the wider area. The weight that I afford to the suggested design improvements is accordingly limited.
19. Native hedgerow and pollinator planting to site boundaries could be secured by condition, but would be unlikely to offer significant screening to the upper part of the side extension and while there could be some benefit to biodiversity, the effect would be limited. Similarly, the appellants refer to sustainability benefits which would align with objectives in the Framework, but while they mention solar panels and air source heat pump ready infrastructure, these are not indicated on the plans or detailed as part of the proposed development. Furthermore, these measures could raise additional considerations including around effects on the appearance of the building and living conditions for neighbouring occupiers. Accordingly and because the process would not involve consultation with interested parties, I consider it would not be appropriate to require their implementation through planning conditions. In itself, the extension may achieve high insulation performance and utilise local and recycled materials and certified timber, but this would reflect sustainable design principles expected by the Framework and the magnitude of any benefit would be very limited. I therefore attach limited weight to these factors.
20. The proposal would provide additional and enhanced accommodation for the occupiers of the dwelling. The appellants additionally refer to improved privacy and safety from relocation of a bedroom upstairs, but the dwelling is set back from the street providing a degree of privacy in any event and there is no substantive evidence demonstrating any particular safety issue rather than a generalised concern. It is further unclear from the submitted evidence why relocation of this bedroom elsewhere within the dwelling could not reasonably be achieved without the proposal. This limits the weight that I afford to this consideration.

Planning Balance

21. The Council has not specifically argued that the proposal would conflict with any of the purposes of including land within the Green Belt which are set out in the Framework. Nevertheless, I have found above that the proposal would be inappropriate development which is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and which the Framework sets out should not be approved except in very special circumstances. It would also cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt, albeit that this would be relatively modest and localised. In accordance with the Framework, I give this harm substantial weight.
22. The Framework indicates that '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.
23. Here, the suggested enhancements to the design and appearance of the dwelling and Bridge Cottages as a pair; new planting; sustainability benefits; and improved privacy, safety and accommodation each attract limited weight. Even taken together, I find that the weight of the other considerations does not clearly outweigh

the harm that I have identified so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development in the Green Belt.

24. The proposal would therefore conflict with the Framework, as well as with saved Policies 1 and 13 of the LPR.
25. Given this conflict and notwithstanding that there may be no conflict with saved Policies 39, 40, 69 or 72 of the LPR, I find that the proposal would conflict with the development plan when it is read as a whole. Furthermore, material considerations do not indicate that a decision contrary to the development plan should be reached.

Conclusion

26. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR