

Design, Access, and Planning Statement



An application
for the conversion of the existing
building into a dwelling

at

Rockley House,
Wrotham Road,
Culverstone
DA13 0QN

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Design, Access and Planning Statement has been prepared to support an application for the conversion of an existing detached garage and store building into a two-bedroom dwelling with two parking spaces at, Rockley House, Wrotham Road, Culverstone, DA13 0QN.
- 1.2. In addition to this Design, Access and Planning Statement, the application is accompanied by a Highways and Transport Technical Note prepared by Motion.
- 1.3. The application is a revised application following a refusal of planning permission under Council reference 2021/0198 which was also subsequently dismissed on appeal on the 24th January 2023.
- 1.4. This Design, Access and Planning Statement has been prepared in the light of the Inspectors conclusions in the appeal decision and also having regard to Development Plan Policy as set out in the Gravesham Core Strategy 2014 and National Planning Policy as set out in the NPPF 2021.

2. THE APPLICATION SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1. The application site is located on the western side of South Street/ Wrotham Road (A227) a relatively short distance to the north of the defined settlement boundary of Culverstone Green. The site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 2.2. Rockley House comprises a double fronted Victorian/Edwardian house which fronts on to South Street but is set well back from the highway behind a substantial hedge. The house is positioned centrally within the frontage. The house is set within extensive mature landscaped grounds.
- 2.3. The existing access to Rockley House is located at the northern end of the site frontage. At a relatively short distance into the site the driveway divides with an access spur heading southwards leading to the front of Rockley house. The main access continues in a westerly direction to a sizeable barn/stable building and other outbuildings located behind and to the north west of Rockley House.
- 2.4. Immediately adjacent to main driveway, at a point where it divides, is an existing detached garage block together with an attached store building. The building as a whole has varied roof heights and roof profiles but it is a building of traditional style and construction with brick elevations and a tiled pitch roof. The building presently houses several cars and has not only the hardstanding of the driveway to its front but, additionally, a further area of hardstanding adjacent to the building on its western side.
- 2.5. There are a number of mature trees to the frontage of the overall site and a sizeable hedgerow extending along most of the frontage.
- 2.6. To the rear of Rockley House are largely open fields, a sand school associated with the stables/barn building and sizeable areas of hardstanding further to the west which contains

general storage of equipment, vehicles and other machinery associated with existing stables and the holding overall.

- 2.7. The current application site is the existing garage and store building adjacent to the northern boundary and to the northern side of the existing access.



3. **THE PREVIOUS APPEAL DECISION**

- 3.1. The previous appeal scheme (2021/0195) involved the enlargement of the roof of the existing store building as well as elevational alterations involving the creation of additional openings.
- 3.2. At paragraph 8 of the appeal decision the Inspector noted that paragraph 150 of the Framework concerns the re-use of buildings that are of permanent and substantial construction. She notes that there is no suggestion that the building is not of permanent and substantial construction. In Green Belt policy terms, therefore, the issue was whether the proposal would cause harm to the Openness of the Green Belt.
- 3.3. The Inspector concluded that the site formed part of an existing residential curtilage which could be used for the parking of vehicles, the storage of bins, garden paraphernalia etc. However, she concluded that the appeal scheme would lead to a more intensive use of the wider site.
- 3.4. The Inspector also concluded that the new access driveway that was proposed in the appeal scheme at the front of Rockley House would involve additional surfacing and additional boundary treatments.
- 3.5. On this basis, the Inspector concluded that there would be harm to openness and that the proposal, therefore, constituted inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 3.6. In relation to the issue of character and appearance, the Inspector concluded that the provision of a new access onto the A227 would require removal of some existing mature hedgerow would have a substantial adverse effect on the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area.
- 3.7. With regard to the issue of highway safety, the Inspector was concerned that it had not been demonstrated that the required visibility splays could be achieved. She was also concerned as

to whether, as expressed in a concurrent appeal that was being pursued and determined concerning land to the rear of Rockley House, that the existing access was capable of enabling two cars to pass each other.



4. THE APPLICATION PROPOSAL

- 4.1. The application proposal is to convert the existing garage and store building into a 2-bedroom dwelling. The proposal would involve the provision of 2 parking spaces on a section of land that is already hardstanding and used for parking. The proposal also involves formation of a private garden area which again currently forms part of the garden area and curtilage of Rockley House.
- 4.2. In relation to the 4 main points of Green Belt openness objection from the Inspector in relation to the previous appeal; firstly, the application proposal would not involve any increase in the height of the roof of the store building. Secondly, the scheme also removes the previously proposed roof lights and reduces the floor to ceiling height openings on the west elevation.
- 4.3. Thirdly, there would be no harm to openness resulting from the additional surfacing and boundary treatments that the Inspector refers to as the proposed new access to the front of Rockley House has now been deleted.
- 4.4. Fourthly, with regard to the Inspectors intensification point arising from residential use, the existing garages are used intensively by the owners to accommodate a number of cars and to provide residential storage to which access is made on a regular basis. A modest 2-bedroom dwelling is unlikely to generate any significantly different level of usage. In any event, a residential use and any intensification that arises from it does not of its self necessarily cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt in the Governments view. Were that to be the case the Government would not have allowed agricultural buildings and other rural buildings in the Green Belt to be changed into residential dwelling houses as permitted development.

- 4.5. In relation to character and appearance, the proposed new access onto South Street/ Wrotham Road that the Inspector was concerned with in the previous appeal is now deleted.
- 4.6. With regard to highway matters the current application would involve use of the existing access onto South Street/Wrotham Road and the accompanying highways/transport technical note demonstrates that acceptable visibility splays can be provided and that the access is of sufficient width to enable 2 cars to pass.
- 4.7. The application proposal involves a significant enhancement in the overall appearance of the building through the use of black horizontal weather boarding, plain clay roof tiles, timber cladding and a profiled metal roof over the store building.
- 4.8. Further landscaping is also proposed with new hedging and planting.
- 4.9. The proposed new dwelling would comply with the Nationally Described Space Standards. All principal rooms would have good levels of light and outlook.

5. **PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS.**

National Planning Policy Framework 2021

5.1 The main purpose of the NPPF (The Framework) is to help achieve sustainable development. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are inter-dependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways;

- **An economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support the growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and co-ordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- **A social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and culture well-being;
- **An environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

5.2 The presumption in favour of sustainable development is set out at paragraph 11 of the Framework. Paragraph 11 (d) states that where policies most important for determining the application are out of date, planning permission should be granted unless;

- i. The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed.*

- 5.3 Footnote 8 advises that policies are to be considered out of date where a Local Planning Authority cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites. It should be noted that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five year housing land supply. This triggers the 'tilted balance' in favour of the application proposal.
- 5.4. Footnote 7 designates the Green Belt as an area of particular importance. Thus, the tilted balance and presumption in favour of planning permission being granted applies in this case unless Green Belt policy provides a clear reason for refusal.
- 5.5. Paragraph 12 advises that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision making. Where an application conflicts with an up to date Development Plan (including any Neighbourhood Plans that form part of the Development Plan) permission should not usually be granted.

Delivering a sufficient supply of homes

- 5.6 Paragraph 60 confirms that, to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed.
- 5.7 Paragraph 68 states that planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability.

- 5.8 Paragraph 74 requires Local Planning Authorities to identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than five years old.
- 5.9 Paragraph 69 states that small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area, and are often built out relatively quickly. To promote the development of a good mix of sites Local Planning Authorities should support the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions – giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes.

Making Effective Use of Land

- 5.10 Paragraph 119 advises that planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes. As much use as possible should be made of previously developed or brownfield land.
- 5.11 Paragraph 120 states that planning decisions should give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs and also to promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained.
- 5.12 Indeed, Paragraph 124 states that planning decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land.

Achieving well-designed places

- 5.13 Paragraph 126 is clear that the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of

sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps makes development acceptable to communities.

5.14 Paragraph 130 advises that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments;

- Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development.
- Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping.
- Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, whilst not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities)
- Establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit.
- Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks.
- Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users, and where crime and disorder and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Protecting Green Belt Land

5.15. Paragraphs 147- 149 set out the presumption against inappropriate development that should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

5.16. Paragraph 149 states that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless the development falls within one of the exceptions categories.

- 5.17. Paragraph 150 of the Framework states that other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided that they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This includes the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of a permanent and substantial construction.
- 5.18. In this case, the application proposal does not involve the construction of a new building and it is paragraph 150, therefore, that applies.

The Development Plan

- 5.19. The Development Plan comprises the Gravesham Local Plan 2014.
- 5.20. Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy Local Plan seeks to direct development in the rural areas to rural settlements inset from the Green Belt. Development outside of the settlements will be supported where it is compatible with National policies for protecting the Green Belt.
- 5.21. Policy CS11 relates to transport. It requires new development to mitigate their impact on the highway and to provide sufficient parking.
- 5.22. Policy CS12 concerns green infrastructure. It requires the landscape character to be protected.
- 5.23. Policy CS19 relates to development and design principles. In general terms, the policy requires new development to be visually attractive, fit for purpose and to conserve and enhance the character of the local environment.

6. ASSESSMENT

Green Belt

- 6.1 Paragraph 150 of the Framework states that the conversion and re-use of existing buildings in the Green Belt constitutes appropriate development provided that the building is of sound and permanent construction and the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it are preserved.
- 6.2 There is no dispute that the existing building is of sound and permanent construction.
- 6.3 The previous scheme for conversion was considered to be harmful to openness by the Inspector on appeal because of the increase in the roof height of the building, the opening in the west elevation and the roof lights and the hardstanding from the proposed access.
- 6.4 The current application does not involve any increase in the roof height of the store building. The current application reduces the full height openings in the west elevation and removes the roof lights. The current application removes the proposed new access way onto South Street/Wrotham Road and retains access from the current driveway.
- 6.5 The Council has recently granted planning permission for similar proposals nearby. Permission was granted under reference 2022/0154 for the conversion of former stable blocks to create two 3 bedroom dwellings at South Street Farm Stables on the opposite side of South Street slightly to the north of Rockley House. Elsewhere in the local area are further examples of dwellings that have either been permitted by the Council or allowed on appeal for conversion of existing buildings to dwelling houses.
- 6.6 In the circumstances, as there would be no harm to openness nor any harm to the purposes of Green Belt Policy, the application proposal can be considered to constitute appropriate development in the Green Belt.

Design

- 6.7 The existing building has little architectural merit and has limited design quality. The application proposal would involve a renovation and enhancement to the appearance of the building through the use of appropriate materials. The proposed building would assume an appearance that would typically be found in a rural area. The overall character and appearance of the area would be enhanced through the proposed design.

Amenity Standards

- 6.8 The proposed dwelling would comply with the Nationally Described Space Standards. All of the habitable rooms would enjoy good levels of light and outlook.
- 6.9 The proposed new dwelling would provide future residents with good outdoor private amenity space which can be also provided with good levels of privacy.
- 6.10 The proposed new dwelling would not cause any adverse impact on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers.

Highways

- 6.11 The proposed dwelling would be provided with 2 parking spaces to the front of the dwelling. The parking area is as existing.
- 6.12 Access to the new dwelling would be from the existing access onto South Street/Wrotham Road. As the Highways/Transport Technical Note demonstrates, the existing access has good visibility in both directions. The existing access into the site is also of sufficient width to enable two vehicles to pass.

7. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The application proposal is appropriate development in the Green Belt. There is no Green Belt reason for refusal and, as Gravesham is unable to demonstrate a 5 Year Housing Land Supply the presumption in favour of planning permission being granted “the tilted balance” applies in this case.
- 7.2 There are no adverse impacts would arise from the scheme that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of providing additional housing. As such planning permission should be granted.