



Delegated Report

Householder Planning Application

Planning Application No:	20231204
Location:	Sunnyview, Carters Hill Lane, Meopham, Gravesend
Description:	Retrospective application for the erection of a wooden cabin to form a gym, with gym equipment storage area and shower room.
Applicant:	Mrs Faye Howlett
Site Visit Date:	9 January 2024

Submitted Documents/Plans

Covering Letter
Application form
Site Location Plan
Pre-Existing Block/Site Plan
Existing Block/Site Plan
Drawing no. MAD-486-02 (Pre-existing and Existing Floor Plans and Elevations)

Relevant Planning History

Reference	Description	Decision	Decision Date
20211435	Conversion of existing detached double garage to create a self-contained annexe, ancillary to the main dwelling.	Permitted	21.01.2022
19930398	Erection of a three bedroom bungalow and a detached double garage with garden store and w.c.	Permitted	10.08.1993
19800841	Stationing of a caravan to replace existing chalet	Permitted	23.12.1980

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale and Distribution of Development
- CS11 – Transport
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Development and Design Principles

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- C13 – Extensions to Dwellings in the Countryside
- T1 – Impact of Development on the Highway Network
- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards

Paragraph 33 of the NPPF (2023) sets out that policies within adopted local plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years and should then be updated as necessary. Such reviews are also a legal requirement as set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.

The Council undertook such a review in September 2019 and found that the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy is in need of a partial review in terms of Policy CS02, due to the increased need for housing since the Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted and the need to ensure that a sufficient land supply exists to meet this need. Whilst saved policies from the Local Plan 1st Review (1994) generally conform with the NPPF (2023), the Council will also seek to replace these.

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

- 2 – Achieving sustainable development
- 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
- 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
- 13 – Protecting Green Belt land
- 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- SPG2 - Residential layout guidelines (2020)
- Householder Extensions/Alterations Design Guide (2021)
- SPG4 - KCC Parking Standards (2006)
- Technical Housing Standards – nationally described space standard (2015)
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

Consultees

Meopham Parish Council

No response received.

Neighbouring properties

The application has been advertised by individual neighbour letters to 5 properties, and on site. The overall consultation period expired on 30 January 2024.

No letters of objection were received.

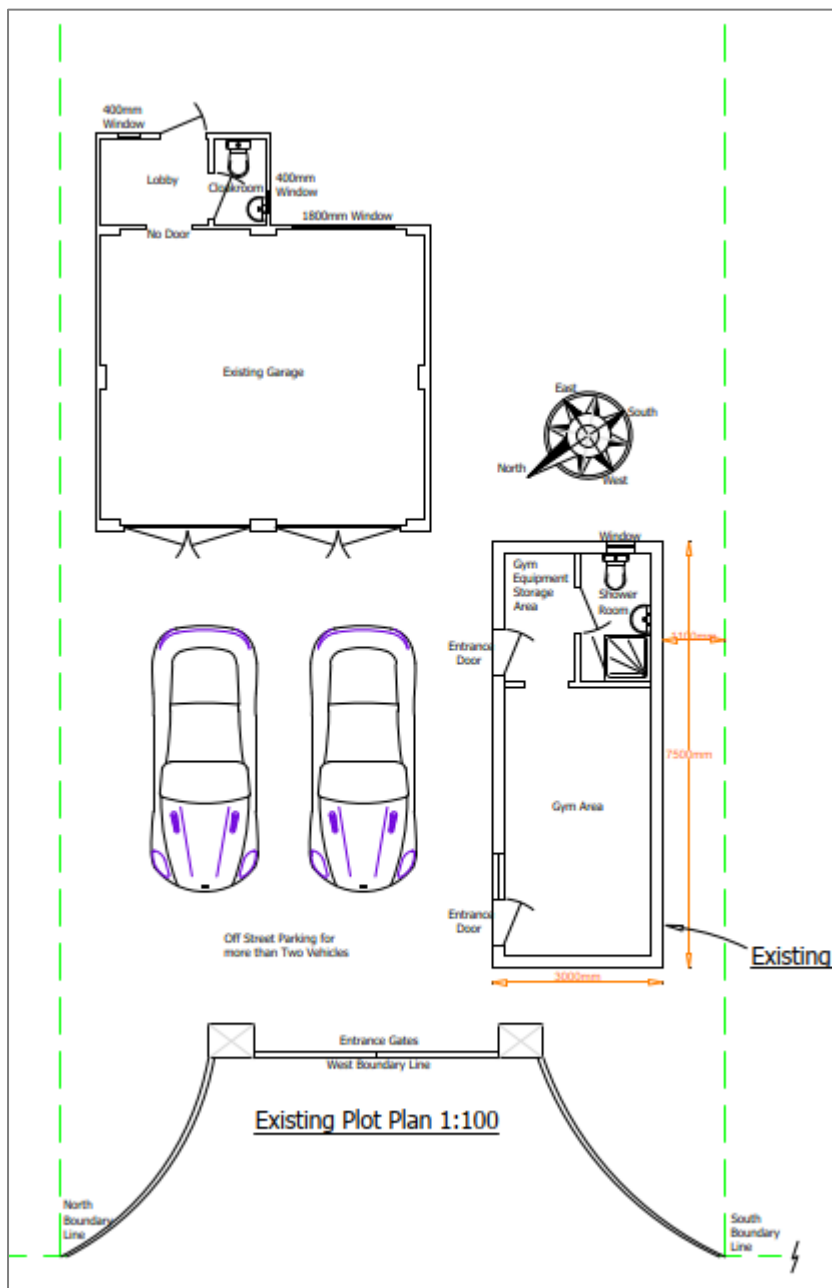
Local Ward Councillors were also consulted, and no responses were received.

Officer's Analysis

Proposal

This retrospective application is for the erection of a wooden cabin to form a gym, with a gym equipment storage area and shower room.

Plot Plan



The cabin measures 7.5m by 3m and has a low-pitched roof up to 2.7m high. It is timber clad with a tiled roof.

The submitted covering letter explains that the reason for the location of the cabin at the front of the property is that the rear garden is very steep and therefore was unsuitable and impractical as a location for the cabin.

Principle Issues

Sunnyview is a detached bungalow on a long, narrow plot with a detached double garage to the front of the property, with a parking area to the front of the garage. The garage also has an existing cloakroom within in. The property was constructed following planning permission in 1993.

The application site is located in the countryside, outside any rural settlement and in the Green Belt. It is also within the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area. Taking these designations into account, the main issues for consideration in the determination of this application are the principle of the development in the Green Belt, and the impacts on landscape character and the appearance of the surrounding area, on

residential amenities and on highways.

Principle of Development in the Green Belt

Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy 2014 prioritises development in the urban area as a sustainable location for development. In the rural area it states that development will be supported within rural settlements that are inset from the Green Belt and defined on the Policies Map. Development outside those settlements (which is the case here), will only be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in the Core Strategy 2014.

Green Belts are of great importance. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by preserving the open and permanent characteristics of Green Belts (paragraph 142 of the NPPF 2023). Paragraph 152 of the NPPF 2023 states 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 resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF 2023 states that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt but lists certain exceptions. These exceptions are set out in sub-paragraphs 154(a) to 149(g). Sub-paragraph 154(c) identifies 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.

In determining proposals for extensions to dwellings in the countryside, account should be taken of saved Policy C13 of the Local Plan 1994. It states that proposals 'for domestic garages and outbuildings will be considered on their individual merits but will be required to be well designed, discreetly sited and subservient to the scale of the main dwelling on the plot.' As saved Policy C13 pre-dates the NPPF, the weight attached to the policy must be considered carefully, with greater weight being given where the approach is consistent with paragraph 154 of the NPPF. However, the main aspects of the policy are broadly in line with the NPPF and should therefore be afforded due weight.

The proposed erection of a garage or other domestic outbuilding does not fall within any of the categories listed in paragraph 154 of the NPPF 2023. However, it is acknowledged that there is case law (most notably *Sevenoaks District Council v Secretary of State for the Environment and Dawe* 1997) which establishes that a domestic outbuilding may be regarded as an extension to a dwelling provided that it forms a 'normal domestic adjunct'. In considering whether a proposal is considered to be a normal domestic adjunct, consideration is given to location and use in relation to the main dwelling. The cabin is used as a gym for the host dwelling and is clearly within its curtilage with a close visual relationship to it, and so it is considered that it would be grouped with the main dwelling. Therefore, the cabin could be regarded as an extension to the dwelling for the purposes of paragraph 154(c) of the NPPF 2023.

In this case, as such, it falls to be considered whether the cabin is a disproportionate addition to the dwelling.

As it can be seen from the planning history above, the application property has not been extended since it was constructed.

The cabin measures 3m by 7.5m, which amounts to 22.5m² in terms of the building footprint. This additional floorspace would not exceed the general one third of the original gross floor area limit for extensions set out in Policy C13 of the Local Plan 1994 (the floor area of the main dwelling is approximately 108m²). On this basis, the proposal would not be considered to result in a disproportionate addition over the size of the original building and would therefore be an appropriate new building in the Green Belt in this regard.

However, NPPF sub-paragraph 154(g) identifies a further exception for new buildings in the Green Belt that relates to limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development. The application proposal should also be considered against this exception.

Impact on Openness

The application site can be described as previously developed land as it is part of an existing residential site. As the development would not provide affordable housing, the proposal can be judged against the first part of paragraph 154(g) of the NPPF 2023, which seeks to prevent a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development on a site.

Paragraph 142 of the NPPF 2023 states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It also states that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence. Paragraph 001 of the Planning Practice Guidance 2019 on Green Belts looks to assess the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt by taking into account the spatial and visual aspects of a development, its duration and remediability, and the activity levels generated.

In this case, whilst the site remains a single residential dwelling, the cabin has introduced a large, permanent structure into what was an open space at the frontmost part of the site, and this has clearly reduced and caused harm to the openness of the Green Belt in this location.

In addition, as the site lies outside any settlement boundary, the development represents an encroachment into the countryside, which is contrary to the purposes of including land within the Green Belt (paragraph 143 of the NPPF 2023), and Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy 2014, which only supports development outside settlement boundaries where it is compatible with national and local policies for protecting the Green Belt. Safeguarding the countryside by minimising the expansion of the Borough's rural settlements is a stated local purpose of the Green Belt as set out at paragraph 4.2.7 of the Core Strategy 2014.

The development is therefore clearly contrary to the requirements of paragraph 154(g) of the NPPF 2023, as the cabin has a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the previously undeveloped front garden. As a result it is an inappropriate development and should be refused on this basis.

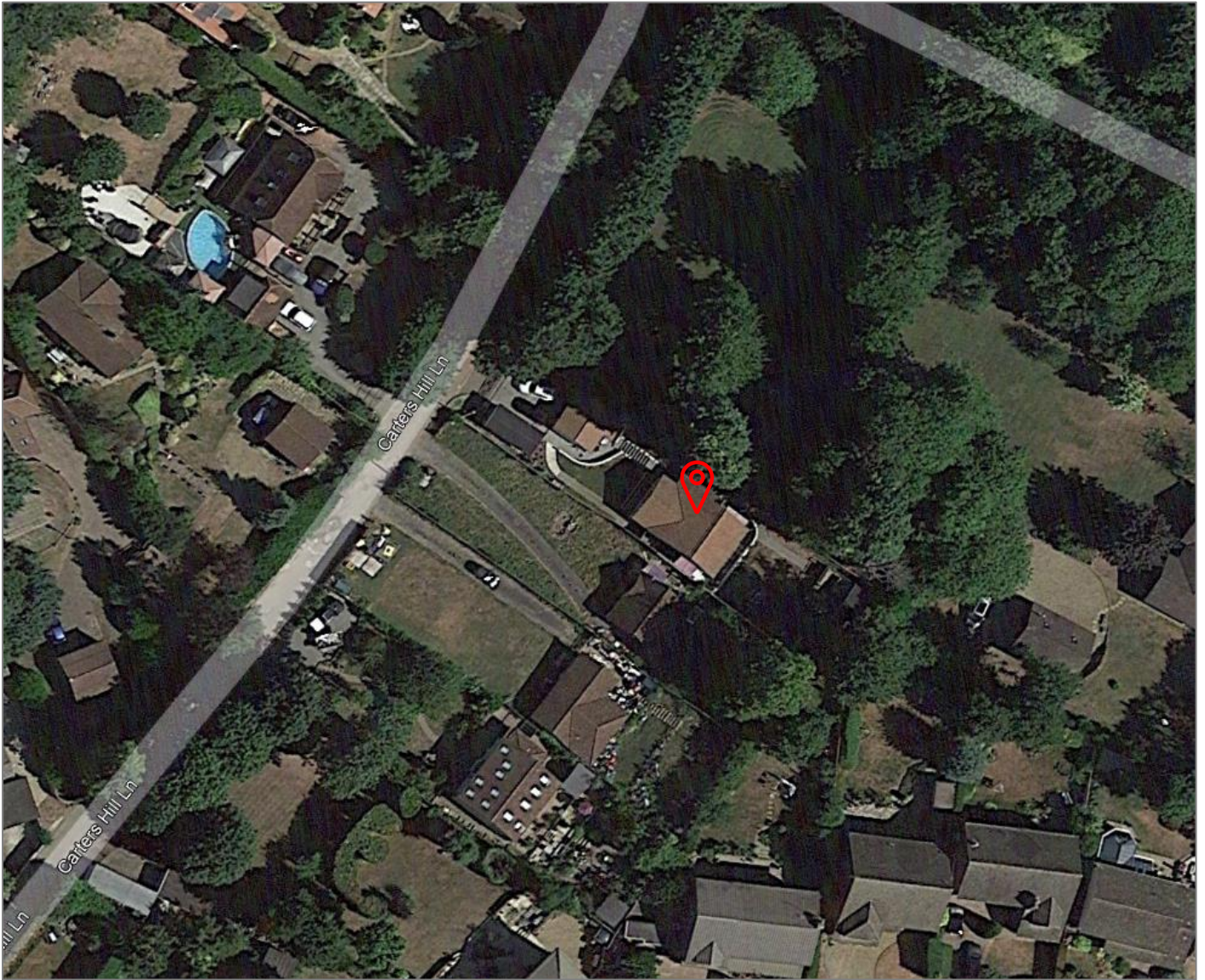
Design and Landscape Character

The site is located in the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area. Paragraph 180 of the NPPF 2023 requires development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (amongst other things) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.

With regard to the impact on the landscape, Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Core Strategy 2014 is relevant to this application, relating to green infrastructure. This policy states that the overall landscape character of the Borough will be conserved, restored and enhanced and that the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (GLCA) 2009 will be taken into account in determining applications. The Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area comprises gently undulating topography with a mixture of arable and pasture farmland. The LCA recognises the overall condition of the landscape as good and the sensitivity of the area as moderate. It is recommended that the key landscape elements should be conserved and reinforced.

The application site is located within the countryside on a rural lane, with detached dwellings on generous plots in the immediate surrounding area. To the front of the application property there is a lawned area with a detached garage, with the cabin being positioned just beyond the garage and hardstanding to the frontmost part of the site.

Current Google Earth Image



Current Site Photos



View along road to south-west



The presence of the cabin has resulted in an increase in the amount of built development at the front of the residential curtilage into an area of the site that was previously open, with the result that a large proportion of site frontage now has buildings on it stretching back to the main house.

Google Earth Street View Image 2016



Whilst, like the application site, there are some properties on the road that have a detached garage to the front of the main dwelling, the front gardens along the road are generally open and soft landscaped. There are certainly no buildings other than garages in forward positions along this part of the road. The proposal is therefore considered to unacceptably urbanise the character of this site and has resulted in a prominent and overly excessive number of buildings to the front of the main dwelling and a lack of openness to the front garden. This is out of character with the front gardens of neighbouring dwellings. As such, the proposed development would be detrimental to the rural landscape character of the surrounding area.

Specifically in terms of design, paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2023 sets out various design requirements and includes the need for development to add to the overall quality of an area; be visually attractive; and be sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment. Paragraph 139 of the NPPF states that development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design.

Policy CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy September 2014 requires new development to be visually attractive, fit for purpose and locally distinctive. It should conserve and enhance the character of the local built, historic and natural environment and integrate well with the surrounding local area. In particular the design of new development should be derived from a robust analysis of local context and character and

make a positive contribution to the street scene and the character of the area.

As referenced above, saved Policy C13 of the Local Plan 1994 specifically states that proposals for outbuildings in the countryside are required to be well designed, discreetly sited and subservient to the scale of the main dwelling on the plot.

The design of the cabin, which is somewhat reminiscent of a caravan, is located prominently at the frontmost part of the site, and therefore appears overly large for what would be expected in a front garden. It has introduced new built development on what was previously an undeveloped and highly visible site frontage. It urbanises the application site and is out of keeping with the character of surrounding properties.

Overall, it is considered that the cabin is excessive in size for its location, prominent in position and detrimental to the rural character and appearance of the surrounding area. The proposal is therefore contrary to the requirements of Policies CS12 and CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014 and saved Policy C13 of the Local Plan 1994.

Residential Amenity

The NPPF 2023 states that planning decisions should aim to secure a high standard of amenity for all existing and future users (paragraph 135f). The impact on amenity is also considered with regard to the criteria within Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014, which states that new development should be located, designed and constructed to safeguard the amenity, including privacy, daylight and sunlight, of its occupants, and those of neighbouring properties and land.

Future Occupiers

The cabin does not harm the amenity of future occupiers of the property and sufficient garden is retained to comply with the Borough Council's Residential Layout Guidelines. As such, the proposal is in line with Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014.

Neighbouring Properties

The single storey nature and position of the cabin would not cause any sense of enclosure, loss of light, outlook or privacy to neighbouring properties. The submitted plans show no encroachment onto neighbouring land. Details of landscaping would have to be conditioned on any forthcoming to ensure that the cabin is integrated back into its surroundings.

Overall, the proposal would safeguard the amenities of neighbouring properties, and as such, would comply with Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014 and paragraph 135(f) of the NPPF 2023.

Parking and Highways

There are no changes proposed to the site access and there is adequate car parking provision on the site; there are no objections to the proposal on this basis. The proposal is therefore acceptable in relation to parking and highway safety, in accordance with Policy CS11 of the Core Strategy 2014 and saved Policy P3 of the Local Plan 1994.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The cabin is considered to comprise an inappropriate development in the Green Belt that would introduce built development into this open front garden, causing permanent detriment and greater harm to the openness of the Green Belt than existing development. There are no very special circumstances that exist that would outweigh the harm resulting from the proposal by reason of inappropriateness, or any other harm. The development is therefore contrary to the requirements of paragraphs 11, 142, 143, 152, 153 and 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2023, and Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014.

The size and prominent location of the cabin to the front of the main dwelling is out of keeping with the character and appearance of surrounding properties and detrimental to the rural landscape characteristics of the wider Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area. As such, the proposal would fail to comply with the requirements of Policies CS02, CS12 and CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014, saved Policy C13 of the Gravesham Local Plan 1994 and paragraphs 135 and 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2023.

(For detailed reasons for refusal and informatives, see draft Decision)

Case Officer:	Mrs Katherine Parkin	Team Leader:	Richard Hart
Signed:	<i>K. Parkin</i>	Signed:	<i>R Hart</i>
Dated:	7 February 2024	Dated:	8th February 2024