
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 February 2021

by R C Shrimplin MA(Cantab) DipArch RIBA FRTPI FCI Arb MCIL
an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 01 March 2021

Appeal Reference: APP/K2230/D/20/3265109

Land at 'The Barn', 'East Court Farm', Church Lane, Gravesend DA12 2NL

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr H Singh against the decision of Gravesend Borough Council.
 - The application (reference 20200176, dated 25 September 2020) was refused by notice dated 25 September 2020.
 - The development proposed is described in the application form as "the replacement of existing outbuildings with new garage/garden building".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

3. The first main issue to be determined in this appeal is whether the proposal is "inappropriate development" in terms of Green Belt policies. If so, it is necessary to consider whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness together with any other harm that might be caused (including the effect of the development on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it) would be clearly outweighed by other considerations.
4. In addition, in this case, it is also necessary to consider the impact of the proposed development on the host building and its surroundings.

Reasons

5. Church Lane runs through the countryside to the east of the built-up area of Gravesend, linking the A226 Gravesend Road with Lower Higham Road, to the north. The surroundings are rural in character, with scattered development along the lane in a primarily agricultural landscape that extends either side of it, to the east and west.
6. 'The Barn' is one of a group of properties associated with 'East Court Manor' that is located towards the northern end of the lane. 'East Court Manor' is an eighteenth-century farmhouse that is listed, Grade II, as a building of special architectural or historic interest and the farm buildings that were previously associated with it have been converted to form three spacious and attractive houses.

7. The converted buildings are grouped around a shared courtyard space, with a separate garage building, and 'The Barn' shares a large building on the eastern side of the courtyard with 'The Granary'. The conversions have been carried out to a high design standard, retaining the sweeping roofs of the original farm buildings and their essential agricultural character, contributing to the setting of the listed building.
8. 'The Barn' is located to the north of 'The Granary' and it has an area of garden at the side, as well as a small back garden, over which it looks out onto an open field beyond.
9. It is now proposed to construct an extension to 'The Barn', on the side garden area, adding a distinctly separate element to the existing building, connected by a short, glazed link section.
10. The appeal site lies within the Green Belt, where development is strictly controlled. Policy CS02 of the 'Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy' (which was adopted in September 2014) is a broad planning policy that is intended to prevent development in the Green Belt except in certain limited cases, by reference to national planning policies. The 'Gravesham Local Plan' was adopted in 1994 and Policy C13 contains more specific criteria for extensions to dwellings in the countryside and, among other things, seeks to prevent "undue visual intrusion into the open countryside".
11. Other policies in the Development Plan are intended to promote good design and to protect the qualities of the countryside, more generally. In particular, Development Plan policies are aimed at protecting heritage and the historic environment, notably at Policy CS20 of the 'Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy' and Policy TC2 of the 'Gravesham Local Plan'.
12. The 'National Planning Policy Framework', published in 2019, is more up to date than the formally adopted Local Plan and it also emphasises the strict controls on development that apply in Green Belts. It is made clear that the construction of new buildings is "inappropriate in the Green Belt" and is not normally acceptable there. Paragraph 145 identifies some limited exceptions to this, however, including extensions to existing dwellings that do not amount to "disproportionate additions" to the original building.
13. The 'National Planning Policy Framework' also emphasises the importance of conserving and enhancing the historic environment (especially at Section 16), though it points out the special considerations that apply to designated heritage assets, deriving from legislation. In this case, the appeal building is described by the Council as being "curtilage listed" (although that is unclear from the evidence provided) and it clearly lies within the setting of the listed farmhouse, forming a significant feature in the setting. In such cases, it is necessary to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting.
14. Of course, the 'National Planning Policy Framework' also emphasises the importance of good design as a general objective (notably at Section 12), together with protecting and enhancing the countryside, although at the same time it is aimed at making effective use of land and encouraging economic activity.

15. The proposed extension would be constructed in the image of an agricultural building, with timber side cladding and a steeply pitched roof, using similar materials to those on the exterior of the host building. The eaves height would be above normal ground floor level, providing extra height overall but without creating a fully two-storey building visually. In this way, space would be provided on the first floor as a bedroom and bathroom (thus creating a "guest suite"), with a large "home gym" and "changing room" on the ground floor. Thus, the extension would add significantly to the available accommodation in the existing house.
16. The original barn was converted relatively recently and it has been submitted that the proposed extension would add less than one third to the existing floorspace. Nevertheless, the building extension would be large by comparison with the existing house and, although it would be smaller than the host building, with a much lower ridge line, it would represent a substantial addition to the building volume at the property.
17. In view of the scale and bulk of the proposed extension, it would amount to a disproportionate addition to the original building and, hence, an "inappropriate development" in the Green Belt. In such cases, the 'National Planning Policy Framework' explains that "very special circumstances" are required, if a grant of planning permission is to be justified.
18. The proposed scheme would provide additional accommodation for 'The Barn' and I accept that it would be useful as such. The extension has been designed to harmonise with the host building and its surroundings and it would integrate well with its surroundings, since the simplicity and directness of the design reflect the character of the original farm buildings and would not detract from them. Moreover, the separation between the new extension and the original barn building would underline the evolving nature of the building group and identify its historic derivation. Thus, the proposed extension would be architecturally attractive in itself and it would not harm the character or appearance of the surroundings, nor the setting of the listed farmhouse, more specifically. The scheme has clear architectural merit.
19. Nevertheless, the new extension would create a significant new building bulk in the Green Belt and would amount to "inappropriate development" in terms of Green Belt policies, having an adverse effect on the openness of the Green Belt. The benefits of the proposed extension do not amount to the "very special circumstances" that are needed to outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness in the Green Belt. I am convinced, therefore, that the appeal must fail and, although I have considered all the matters that have been raised in the representations, I have found nothing to cause me to alter my decision.

Roger C Shrimplin

INSPECTOR