

Delegated Report

Full Planning Application

Application No:	20221028
Location:	Badgers Wood, Valley Lane, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent, DA13 0DQ
Description:	Demolition of existing derelict chalet accommodation and construction of new dwelling.
Applicant:	Mr Connor Cutts
Site Visit:	N/A Desktop Assessment

Submitted Documents/Plans

- Application Form - dated 20/09/2022;
- Design and Access Statement - dated 18/07/2022;
- Drawing no. BWVL001 - Detached Garage Elevations;
- Drawing no. BWVL002 - Detached Garage Floor Plans and Dimensions;
- Drawing no. BWVL003 - New Dwelling Floor Plans and Elevations;
- Drawing no. BWVL004 - Dimensions, Site Location Plan, Block Plans and Site Levels;
- Drawing no. BWVL005 - Site Landscaping Plan;
- Drawing no. BWVL006 - Existing Floor Plans and Elevations.

Relevant Planning History

Reference	Description	Decision	Decision Date
20171080	Demolition of existing buildings and erection of two 3 bedroom detached dwellings each with a detached double garage at the front.	REFUSED	08.12.2017
AP 2018/00011/ REF		APPEAL DISMISSED	17.10.2018
20010487	Outline application for the erection of a detached dwelling.	REFUSED	06.09.2001
20000497	The continued use of land for the stationing of a caravan.	CERTIFICATE REFUSED	01.12.2000
19710023	erection of weekend and holiday chalet in replacement of weekend and holiday caravan	REFUSED	23.07.1971
19550154	Erection of a chalet for weekend and holiday use	REFUSED	05.08.1955

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (September 2014):

- CS01 - Sustainable Development
- CS02 - Scale & Distribution of Development
- CS12 - Green Infrastructure
- CS18 - Climate Change
- CS19 - Development & Design Principles

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- P3 - Vehicle Parking Standards
- C12 - Replacement Dwellings in the Countryside

Paragraph 33 of the NPPF (2021) 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 (2021), the Council will also seek to replace these.

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

- Section 2 - Achieving sustainable development
- Section 5 - Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Section 12 - Achieving well-designed places
- Section 13 - Protecting Green Belt Land
- Section 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- SPG 2 - Residential layout guidelines including Housing Standards Policy Statement October 2015 Adopted 1996 - amended June 2020
- Technical Housing Standards - Nationally Described Space Standard (2015)
- SPG 4 - KCC Parking Standards (2006)
- Gravesham Householder Extensions/Alterations Design Guidance (SPD) (2021)
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

External Consultees

Kent County Council (Public Rights of Way) - Public Rights of Way NS270 and NS295 lie to the east and west of the application area and may be affected by the application and I therefore enclose a copy of the Public Rights of Way network map showing the definitive line of these paths for your information.

It is important to advise the applicants that a public right of way must not be stopped up, diverted, obstructed or the surface disturbed and there must be no encroachment on the current width, at any time now or in future. This includes any building materials or waste generated during any of the construction phases. Please note that no furniture or fixtures may be erected on or across Public Rights of Way without the express consent of the Highways Authority.

Meopham Parish Council - Objects to this planning application on the grounds of inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Internal Consultees

GBC - Environmental Protection (Regulatory Services) - This property has a history of fly tipping. Therefore, a contaminated land 'watching brief' condition is recommended. In addition, due as it's a fairly rural location and the plot is immediately adjacent to a Green Belt area, lighting levels are likely to be low. In this respect, any external lighting needs to be installed with this in mind and the relevant lighting guidance - ILE 'Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Light Pollution'. It is important to ensure that any lighting does not affect neighbouring properties.

In respect of these and other matters, the following conditions and informatives are recommended.

- *Watching Brief* - The applicant shall undertake a watching brief during construction in case any contamination issue is encountered. If during development any contamination is found, the local planning authority should be informed as soon as practical and the work shall not continue until written agreement is provided by the LPA as to the appropriate measures to be taken to resolve the matter and they are satisfied that those measures have been carried out.
- *Code of Practice on Construction and Demolition* - Please apply due to the proximity of other residential premises.
- *Lighting* - Artificial lighting can cause a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It is important that the applicants are not permitted to install external lighting that illuminate anything other than the ground within the curtilage of the new property in order to assist in preventing a nuisance from occurring (which would be most likely if the bedrooms on neighbouring properties are illuminated).
- *Drainage/sewerage informative* - The foul sewage shall be removed by means of the mains drainage system and not by the use of non-mains sewerage systems, unless connection to the drainage system is not reasonably practicable. If foul sewage is to be removed using non-mains sewerage systems, a sewage treatment plant or septic tank system will be considered in preference to a cesspool. Such a system may require the prior consent of the Environment Agency under the terms of the Water Resources Act 1991. Applicants are therefore advised to discuss their requirements with the Environment Agency at the earliest opportunity. It should be ensured that the septic tank or cesspool is of adequate capacity to serve the proposed development and suitable access and hardstanding area shall be maintained to it on site.

GBC - Highways Officer - This proposal uses an existing vehicular access on a section of road with limited traffic, whilst ideally a sight line drawing should be submitted, in this instance I would suggest it is sufficient to have a condition that prohibits any boundary treatment, soft or hard landscaping over one metre in height within 2.4 metres of the highway.

It is noted that foul water drainage is to be accommodated by a cesspool which will require visits by a tanker to empty its contents, but the information supplied suggest this can be readily accommodated off street.

Local Ward Councillors - No comment received.

Neighbouring properties

Two notices were displayed around the site. In addition, two surrounding properties were consulted, and no representations were received. The consultation period expired 13th December 2022.

Previous Applications

This application follows a refusal (ref. 20171080) and a dismissed appeal (2018/00011/REF). The previous application proposed the “demolition of existing buildings and erection of two 3 bedroom detached dwellings each with a detached double garage at the front”, and was refused by the Local Planning Authority for the following reasons:

1. *The site is within the approved Metropolitan Green Belt. Within the Green Belt there is a strong presumption against permitting new development outside of the present defined extent of urban areas and the present extent of any village. National Planning Policy Framework Section 9 (Protecting Green Belt Land) indicates that the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness. The proposed dwellings and excavation works are inappropriate development and would cause harm to the Green Belt, and to the character and appearance of the area. As such the proposal is considered to be contrary to the advice in National Planning Policy Framework Section 9 (Protecting Green Belt Land), and Policy CS02 (Scale and Distribution of Development) of the Core Strategy.*
2. *The site is within a designated Havel Wooded Downs landscape character area and the proposed dwellings would be detrimental to the landscape by introducing inappropriate development which will result in significant harm by suburbanising the area and would further blur the boundary between the built up village and Culverstone Valley. The development is contrary to Policy CS12 of the Core Strategy which seeks to give long term protection of these areas.*
3. *The application site is not considered to be within a sustainable location for the dwellings having regard to their distance from retail, educational and community facilities. The site is not located in an area well served by public transport. The proposed development is therefore considered to be contrary to Paragraph 70 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Policy CS01 of the Core Strategy.*

In order to receive a favourable decision, this proposal must be considered to overcome the reasons for refusal attached to the previous application.

Officer's Analysis

Site Description and Context

The application site is located to the eastern side of Valley Lane, Culverstone. Badgers Wood is a vacant but a generous plot, which the application maintains is previously developed land. There are two buildings on the site, however the buildings are small sheds and are not considered permanent buildings or chalet accommodation. As demonstrated in the photograph below, the site has the appearance of a paddock.



The location within the Green Belt must be the starting point for determining this application.



Paragraph 140 of the NPPF (2021) states that Green Belt boundaries should only be amended in exceptional circumstances, in the context of the preparation or review of a Local Plan, it is not for the current application to seek to amend such a policy designation.

On this matter, it is noted that the Inspector in finding the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS) (2014) sound, was clearly of the opinion that a plan-led process should be followed rather than the ad hoc release of sites. The Inspector's report states at paragraph 48 that:

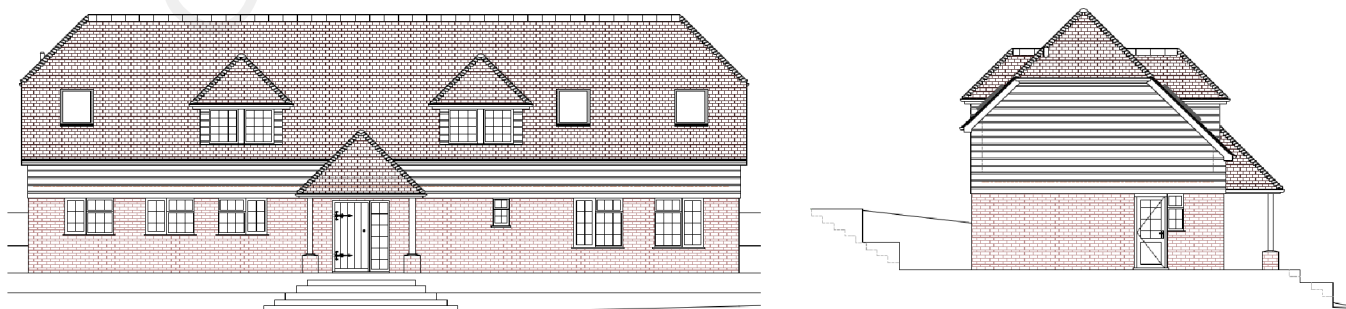
Nevertheless, a small element of total new housing supply would still need to come from the Green Belt to meet the overall requirements in the plan period, albeit in the latter part thereof. This should only reasonably and realistically be identified as part of a formal Green Belt review process that includes full public consultation and a comparative assessment of realistic opportunities, rather than through any "one off" releases in advance thereof. This should be conducted through a formal statutory process, as distinct from any ad hoc site by site decisions that would not necessarily identify the most suitable and sustainable locations for any new housing that may be required in the Green Belt.

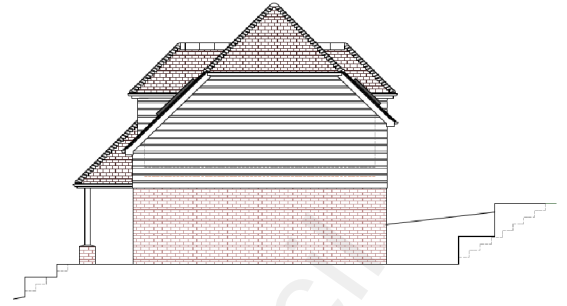
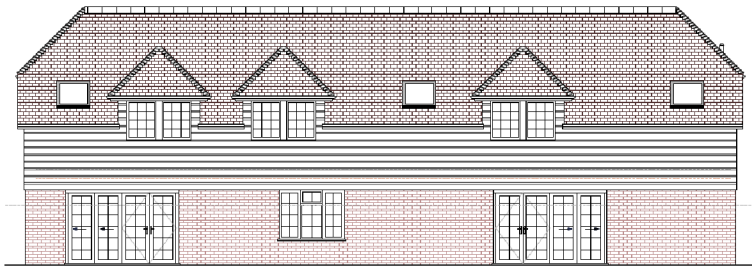
It is therefore considered that the key issues in this application relating to the Green Belt are:

- Whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the NPPF (2021) and LPCS.
- Whether any 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 the development.

Proposed Development

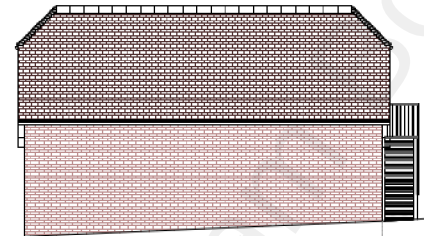
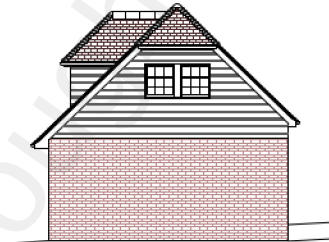
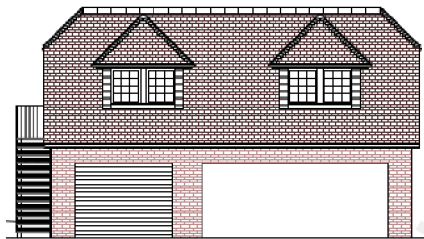
This application proposes the demolition of the existing sheds on the site and erection of a four-bedroom dwelling and detached garage. The new dwelling is a chalet style property with front and rear dormer windows to create space in the loft for habitable rooms. The property would have an overall height of 9.75m and an eave height of 3.45m, with a depth of 6.95m and a width of 19.75m. It is designed with an open canopy porch.





Internally, at ground floor, there would be an open plan kitchen/diner, utility room, boot/shower room, a pantry, a dining room, large entrance hallway, w.c. and lounge. At first floor there would be two en-suite bedrooms, two bedrooms and a family bathroom.

The garage would have space to park three vehicles at ground floor, with an office, storage space and a w.c. at first floor level. The building itself would have a width of 10.2m, a depth of 6.6m, a maximum height of 6.5m and an eave height of 3.2m.



The proposed layout of the development is shown in the screenshot below. There will be a large driveway and hardstanding to the front, with the property set-back and above the highway.



Housing Need

Given Gravesham's current inability to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply (a 3.27 year supply has most recently been calculated), and as the delivery of housing was substantially below (less than 75%) that required by the Housing Delivery Test, the housing delivery element of Gravesham's Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS) (2014) Policy CS02 must be regarded to be out of date, as required by the Paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021). This requires that in regard to housing development, 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; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

In the Gravesham context, the policies referred to in paragraph 11(d)(i) above are those set out in the NPPF (2021) at footnote 7 (rather than those in development plans) relating to any of the following:

- Habitats sites (and those sites listed in NPPF paragraph 182)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- Green Belt,
- Local Green Space,
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Irreplaceable habitats;
- Designated heritage assets (& other heritage assets of archaeological interest, see NPPF footnote 68); and
- Areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

In determining applications for planning permission involving housing, the Council will therefore apply a weighted balance in favour of granting planning permission in accordance with relevant case law and guidance, having regard to the acceptability or otherwise of the proposals when evaluated against development plan policy, the need to make efficient use of land (paragraph 125(c)) in context, the relative contribution the proposal makes towards the alleviation of any shortfall in housing delivery at that time and any other considerations material to the proposed development.

The proposed development for a net increase of '1' residential units would offer a minimal contribution towards meeting this local need and, accordingly, officers considers that this should be accorded appropriate weight in support of the application. However, this has to be balanced against other requirements of the NPPF (2021).

Green Belt

The application site is located in the Green Belt and as such Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS) (2014) is relevant. Development in the urban area is prioritised as the sustainable location for development. In the rural area, Policy CS02 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, i.e. in the Green Belt, will only be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in the LPCS.

There are five principle issues in determining this application;

1. Is the proposed development appropriate in the Green Belt?
2. The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
3. Any very special circumstances?
4. Sustainability;
5. Impact on the landscape;

6. The effect on the character and appearance of the area; and
7. Other matters.

1. Is the proposed development appropriate in the Green Belt?

There are strict policy considerations within the Green Belt whereby paragraph 147 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 148 goes on to say 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. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt unless it falls within the specified exceptions. The NPPF (2021) exceptions to this are: -

- (a) *Buildings for agriculture and forestry;*
- (b) *the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;*
- (c) *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*
- (d) *the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;*
- (e) *limited infilling in villages;*
- (f) *limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and*
- (g) *limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:*
 - *not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or*
 - *not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.*

This application states that the existing derelict chalet accommodation will be demolished, with a new dwelling constructed in its place. The supporting information includes some site photographs but do not show a chalet or any substantial built form, except for two shed like structures. This correlates with the assessment made by the Inspector in the 2018 appeal (ref. AP2018/00011/REF (Appendix 1)):

“The appellant maintains that the proposal comprises previously developed land. The basis for this assertion is that there are two buildings on the site, along with unused building materials, and that the site has allegedly been the subject of fly tipping in the past. However, I observed that the buildings are small, shed like structures which, on the basis of the photos provided by the appellant, do not appear as permanent buildings... Whilst the grass on the site may be regularly mown, there is no significant evidence before me to demonstrate that this is undertaken in connection with an existing lawful residential or commercial use. The Council do not regard the land as previously developed, and the planning history indicates a history of refusals of planning permission and lawful development certificates for various types of development on this land. Overall, the evidence before me is insufficient to demonstrate that the site should be regarded as previously developed land for the purposes of the Framework.”

Consequently, the site is not previously developed land and the shed structures on the site are not considered to be ‘chalet accommodation’ as argued in this application. As such, the proposal is for the

construction of new buildings within the Green Belt which is inappropriate development as set out in paragraph 147 of the NPPF (2021). There are no relevant exceptions to inappropriate development within the NPPF (2021) that would apply to this proposal and no new information has been provided to address this issue from the previous refusal (ref. 20171080) or the subsequent dismissed appeal. Therefore, it is concluded that the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

2. The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt

Paragraph 137 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.

The openness of the Green Belt has both spatial and visual aspects, and any new built form of development is harmful to its open character. The new dwelling and large garage would significantly exceed the height, scale and massing of the existing structures currently on the site. As aforementioned in this report, the existing site has the appearance of an open paddock, which would be lost as a result of the significant increase in built development. Therefore, the open appearance of the site would be lost, and the visual openness of the Green Belt eroded.

Additionally, the appearance of the development would be consistent with a residential use and the use of the site would change to a domestic scene ordinarily associated with a suburban location. The new buildings would be surrounded by driveway and hardstanding to the front and a patioed private garden area to the rear. This change in appearance from an open paddock to residential property would reinforce an existing pattern of suburbanisation found along Valley Lane, encroaching on the open and undeveloped appearance of the wider surrounding area. Therefore, in spatial terms there would also be a harmful loss of openness.

Moreover, the scale and massing of the proposed dwelling are disproportionate in relation to the plot (as assessed in the Design section below), which erodes both the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt.

Below is an assessment of the harm that the proposed development will have on the Green Belt:

Permanent loss of openness - Openness and permanence are the essential characteristics of the Green Belt. The application site currently contains two small shed like structures in an open paddock.

The large dwelling and garage, associated parking, hardstanding, residential paraphernalia and lighting will permanently and irrevocably harm the Green Belt through loss of openness. Whilst it may be possible to mitigate visual impact to a limited degree by screening, this cannot overcome the adverse impact on openness which is defined by the presence or absence of the buildings themselves.

Encroachment of the countryside - This is a stated national purpose of the Green Belt at paragraph 142 of the NPPF (2021). The construction of a new dwelling on the site would introduce urbanising features (additional car parking, light pollution, hard landscaping and residential paraphernalia) that would adversely affect the character of the settlement at a point of transition from the denser built form to the South along Valley Lane to the open Green Belt to the north (as demonstrated in the Gravesham Local Plan Policy Map (2014)).

Although landscaping and boundary treatment could be introduced to reduce the impact of the development, the development would represent the encroachment of built development which would result in a reduction in openness.



Safeguarding the countryside by minimising the expansion of the Borough's rural settlements - This is a stated local purpose of the Green Belt as set out at paragraph 4.2.7 of the adopted LPCS. As noted above, the Local Planning Authority considers the proposal subject of the application to represent an encroachment of the countryside. This would take place as a result of the effective expansion of development north on Valley Lane.

Reference back to paragraphs 147 and 148 of the NPPF (2021) informs us that inappropriate development in the Green Belt should not be approved except in very special circumstances and that very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. Whether the development causes any other harm and whether there are any other relevant considerations to balance the overall planning argument, should now be considered.

3. Consideration of 'very special circumstances'

Having concluded that the development is inappropriate development, very special circumstances need to be considered as part of the Green Belt assessment. No specific arguments have been put forward by the applicant in relation to the assessment of 'very special circumstances'.

Final Balancing Exercise on Green Belt Issues

The development proposed constitutes inappropriate development within the Green Belt. The new dwelling and garage will significantly increase the scale of built form over and above the existing situation, which would adversely impact on the openness of the Green Belt, result in an encroachment of the countryside by blurring the distinction between the denser grain of development to the south and the open Green Belt to the north. Therefore, it is considered that substantial weight should be accorded to the harm caused to the Green Belt in line with the NPPF (2021).

4. Sustainability

The NPPF (2021), taken as a whole, represents the Government's view of what constitutes sustainable development. Paragraph 80 of the NPPF (2021) provides specific advice on sustainable development in rural areas and seeks to avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances, which are listed as follows:

- a) *There is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;*
- b) *The development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;*
- c) *The development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting;*
- d) *The development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential dwelling;*
- e) *The design is of exceptional quality, in that it:*
 - *is truly outstanding or innovative, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and*
 - *would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.*

It should be noted that a number of recent appeal decisions within the Borough of Gravesham have clarified the issue on sustainability in relation to both new build dwellings and conversions within the countryside.

Appeal decision APP/K2230/A/12/2186760 (Appendix 2) related to an outline application for erection of a detached dwelling and garage at land adjacent to the See-Ho Public House, Shorne, Gravesend, Kent which is situated directly adjacent to the settlement boundary of Shorne Ridgeway. The site the subject of this application is located 160 metres from the settlement boundary of Culverstone Green and over 1km from the nearest retail unit. When dismissing the above appeal the Inspector stated:

"It was indicated to me at the Hearing that these services are very limited, with no more than a handful of buses a day at best, which reflects the 'infrequent' nature suggested in the Technical Paper. Both are factors which would mean that there would be an over-reliance on private motor vehicles to access local services. The proposal would therefore fail to achieve the social role of the planning system in terms of the lack of accessible local services, and the environmental role by minimising waste and pollution."

The Inspector went on to state *"due to limited accessibility, there would be difficulty for future occupiers in accessing local services to support the community's health, social and cultural well-being, which would be contrary to the social role of planning which seeks these aims. What is more, I have found that there would be significant harm to the Green Belt through inappropriateness. The proposal would therefore fail to fulfil the environmental role of sustainable development which includes contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment."*

It is the Local Planning Authority's view that if the Inspectorate concluded that a proposed dwelling which is directly adjacent to a settlement inset from the Green Belt is deemed to be unsustainable, then the proposed dwelling (the subject of this application) being located within the countryside being over 1km to the boundary of the settlement of Culverstone Green (if going by the roads) is unsustainable. In addition, once future occupiers travel the 1km to the village boundary there is over 1km travelling along footpaths to Whitepost Lane, without any street lighting or footpaths. Furthermore, once persons travel over the 1km the only local services is a small Class E retail shop and petrol station with ancillary Class E shop. The local primary school is a short distance to the north of the petrol station.

It is therefore considered that the sheer distance would result in future occupiers being over reliant on the private motor car in order to access the most basic facilities within Culverstone Green. There is also limited bus services from Culverstone Green and no bus services from within Culverstone Valley itself.

A further appeal decision (APP/K2230/16/3157994) (Appendix 3) relates to conversion and extension of existing stables into a one bedroom residential dwelling at Knights Cottage, Knights Place Farm. Knights Cottage is located 0.7 miles from the town of Strood, but is situated within the Green Belt and Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Notwithstanding the short distance from the town of Strood the Inspector concluded that converting an existing building into a dwelling would be unsustainable form of development and stated the following:

"The appeal development would be located on the edge of a small group of dwellings in the countryside. It would not be within easy walking distance of services, facilities or public transport. Further, the appeal site's entry drive leads onto a very busy road that connects with the M2 motorway. For all these reasons, it is likely that the future occupiers would have a high dependence on private motorised modes of transport. For this reason, it would not be sustainably located. It would result in a new isolated home in the countryside, which would be contrary to paragraph 55 of the Framework, which indicates that such development should be avoided and would fail to accord with Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994) (LP) Policy C11. That policy states that conversion of farm buildings to other uses will be permitted where, amongst other things, the building is a substantial one, of permanent construction and in an appropriate location in relation to roads and services."

Appeal decision APP/K2230/W/15/3003758 (Appendix 4) relates to the development of a new dwelling within the same area as this application (Culverstone Valley Area).

"11. The nearest facilities to the appeal site are located in the village of Culverstone Green, and include a shop, post office and petrol station. There is also a primary school and a bus stop. A limited number of facilities, including a small convenience store and a community centre, are also available in the village of Vigo, approximately 1 kilometre from the appeal site. A wider range of facilities is available in Meopham, some 3.5 kilometres away, including shops, a secondary school, a day nursery, a library and doctors/dentist surgeries. The nearest railway station is at Hook Green, just beyond Meopham when travelling from the appeal site."

12. *The limited range of facilities in Culverstone Green and Vigo are beyond comfortable walking distance. Moreover, the pedestrian route to these facilities involves negotiating narrow and unlit lanes that, whilst hard surfaced, do not have a dedicated pedestrian pavement. The route also involves significant gradients that, whilst not presenting a problem for some people, would present a significant obstacle for those with reduced mobility, including the elderly and those with young children. Pedestrian access to the facilities in Culverstone Green and Vigo would therefore be an unattractive and potentially hazardous prospect, particularly at night, and would be wholly impractical in adverse weather conditions. In relation to the wider range of services in Meopham and the railway station at Hook Green, these difficulties would be compounded by the greater distance involved. It is therefore likely that all these services would be primarily accessed by car, such that the occupiers of the proposed dwelling would be reliant upon the private car for their day-to-day activities.*

13. *I conclude that the proposed development would not provide a suitable site for housing, having regard to the principles of sustainable development. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would be contrary to Policy CS01 of the Core Strategy which provides, amongst other things, that the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the Framework. In this respect, the proposed development would be contrary to the objectives of paragraph 17 of the Framework in terms of actively managing patterns of growth to make the fullest use of public transport, walking and cycling."*

Taking into account the above appeal decisions and the fact that the appeal sites are within the borough of Gravesham and have been assessed against the same local and national planning policies it has to be concluded for the above reasons the application site is deemed to be an unsustainable location for residential use.

The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to paragraph 80 of the NPPF (2021) and CS01 (LPCS) which seek to encourage sustainable living, and the policies of the Framework, which, amongst those cited, include improving conditions in which people live, work, travel and take leisure.

5. Impact on the Landscape

In addition to being within the Green Belt, the site is located within the Harvel Wooded Downs landscape character area. This area is characterised by varied topography, ancient wood and haphazard mosaic resident plots and small holdings. Policy CS12 (LPCS) seeks to protect the Green infrastructure within the Borough and states at 5.7.26 the overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced.

Notwithstanding the argument that soft landscaping/boundary treatment conditions could be used to reduce the visual appearance of the dwelling, no amount of landscaping will be able to replicate the current stance of the site which is a vacant area of land consisting of trees and scrubland which is common feature within the countryside and Culverstone Valley Area. The introduction of a large dwelling on the site with all the associated residential paraphernalia will undermine one of the key characteristics of Harvel Wooded Downs which are haphazard mosaic of residential plots and small holdings set within the woodland.

A further impact of this scheme on the landscape would be the introduction of domestic parking on the site which is currently void of any vehicle parking.

In summary, the proposed dwelling would adversely affect the character of the rural area, becoming more suburban and less rural. The proposal would therefore cause harm to the landscape character and natural beauty of the valued landscape. Therefore, this proposal would conflict with Policy CS12 (LPCS) which seeks to ensure valued landscapes will be conserved restored and enhance the natural environment and integrate well with the surrounding area.

6. The Effect on the Character and Appearance of the Area

Policy CS19 (Development and Design Principles) (LPCS) states that new development will be visually attractive and locally distinctive. It should also conserve and enhance the character of the local built and natural environment and integrate well with the surrounding area. Moreover, Section 12 (Achieving well-designed places) of the NPPF (2021) sets out that developments should function well and add to the overall quality of the area, be visually attractive and sympathetic to local character.

Gravesham's newly published Householder Extensions/Alterations Design Guidance SPD (2021) set out key principles for new developments. Generally, the SPD highlights the importance of new development complimenting and corresponding to existing character and the wider context. In this case, the rural character of the area and other surrounding dwellings should be considered.

The surrounding properties on Valley Drive have a rural character and are chalet style bungalows, with varied size and appearance. The proposed dwelling has a catslide roof on the front elevation to give the perception of it being a chalet style bungalow. However the rear elevation has a more conventional two storey design with a higher eave level. This imbalance is considered poor design, which is reflected in other parts of the proposed dwelling. On the front elevation, the layout and style of the fenestration, as well as the off-centre porch exacerbate this imbalance, and the lack of symmetry is considered to create an incongruous appearance. At the rear the dormer windows interrupt the eaves, which is contrary to the design SPD (2021) that states that roof extensions such as dormers should be set away from eaves. This interruption of the eaves exacerbates the imbalance of the property and is incongruous design.

Furthermore, the scale of the proposed dwelling in relation to the plot is poorly considered. The width of the dwelling almost occupies the full width of the plot, which is considered to be disproportionate and bulky. The overall width has been reduced slightly by the barn hip, however this does little to address the mass and unsympathetic design of the dwelling. It is acknowledged that the neighbour to the south (Pynt A Vale) is similar in terms of width and design, however this property was granted permission prior to the adoption of the current Local Plan (2014) and as such this is not a material consideration or justification for the proposed dwelling.

The garage building is also considered to be imbalanced and disproportionate. However unlike the dwelling the building is top heavy. It is similarly designed with a catslide roof on the front elevation and higher eaves to the rear for the upper storey. The high ridge and low eaves at the front results in a squat appearance and a dominant roof, with the dormer windows creating a domestic appearance. Moreover, the scale of the garage results in a dominant building in close proximity to the highway. It is noted that other properties have large garages along Valley Lane, however the proposed building in this application is at a greater scale and size than these other buildings.

Overall, the design of the proposed dwelling and garage are imbalanced and disproportionate. The two buildings have similar characteristics but are poorly designed and contrary to Policy CS19 (LPCS) and Section 12 of the NPPF (2021).

7. Other matters

Amenity of Future Occupiers

Policy CS19 (LPCS) and Section 12 of the NPPF (2021) require developments to provide adequate living conditions for future occupiers, which is reinforced by the Council's Residential Layout Guidelines (2020) and the Nationally Described Space Standards (2015). These provide minimum requirements for room sizes and amenity space.

The rooms in the proposed dwelling are in accordance with Gravesham's Residential Layout Guidelines (2020) and will receive sufficient natural light. The garden size is also in accordance with the RLG. Therefore, the development is considered to safeguard the amenity of future occupiers in accordance with Policy CS19 (LPCS) and Section 12 of the NPPF (2021).

Impact on amenity of surrounding properties

Policy CS19 (LPCS) requires new development to safeguard the amenity, including privacy, daylight and sunlight, of neighbouring properties and land and Section 12 of the NPPF (2021) requires development to have a high standard of amenity for existing users (In this case surrounding properties).

The proposed dwelling and garage will be approx. 22m from the nearest neighbour to the south, with no flank windows facing towards the neighbour. As a result, there would be no impact in terms of loss of light, overlooking, sense of enclosure or loss of outlook, and the proposal is considered to safeguard the amenity of surrounding properties in accordance with Policy CS19 (LPCS) and Section 12 of the NPPF (2021).

Parking and Highways

The development should an acceptable amount of parking, not be detrimental to the highway network and promote sustainable transport methods, to accord with saved policy T1 and P3 of Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994), Policy CS11 (LPCS) and Section 4 of the NPPF (2021).

The proposal will provide an acceptable amount of onsite parking and the proposed dwelling will not have an adverse impact on the surrounding highway network. However, as discussed previously, the location is unsustainable for pedestrians.

Contaminated land

The application site has a history of fly tipping and as such, Gravesham's Environmental Protection Team (Regulatory Services) have requested that, if permission were forthcoming, a condition ensuring that a contaminated land watching brief is attached to the decision notice.

Drainage

The application site is in a rural location and would require a septic tank system to be installed. There is very limited information submitted in relation to the proposed foul sewage drainage system, however this is not sufficient grounds to refuse the application given that planning conditions could address this matter. Moreover, Gravesham's Environmental Protection Team (Regulatory Services) stated that, if the application were supported, an informative should be attached to the decision notice.

Conclusion

The application has been fully considered and is contrary to local and national planning policy.

The proposed development is inappropriate development within the Green Belt, which is detrimental to its openness and permanence by virtue of the extent, bulk and massing of built development, as well as the increase in residential activity and paraphernalia. The design of the proposed dwelling and garage are disproportionate and imbalanced that result in overly dominant and incongruous appearance, which would result in further harm to the Green Belt setting and detrimentally impact the character of the Harvel Wooded Downs Landscape. As such, the development is contrary to Policies CS02, CS12 and CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014), Gravesham's Design Guidance SPD (2021), as well as Sections 9 and 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

Lastly, the application site is an unsustainable and inappropriate location for the provision of a new dwelling. The development site is situated in Culverstone Valley Area, where there are no retail, community or transport facilities. As such, any potential occupiers are likely to be dependent on the private car as their main mode of transport and the development is contrary to paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) and Policy CS01 of Gravesham's Local Plan Core Strategy (2014).

Therefore, it is recommended that the application is refused.

Recommendation

Refusal

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

Case Officer:	Mr Ethan Bonthron	Team Leader:	Miss Faye Hobbs
Signed:		Signed:	
Dated:	13 th December 2022	Dated:	14 December 2022