



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 January 2025

by Stewart Glassar BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 January 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/K2230/D/24/3345434

Woodlands, 28 Beechwood Drive, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent DA13 0TX

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr D Freeman against the decision of Gravesend Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 20240026.
 - The development proposed is ground floor front extension to allow first floor accommodation to include front and rear dormer windows.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. There are some differences between the measurements stated by the appellant and by the Council. These differences are not large but nonetheless as the appellant's measurements are based on the architect's CAD drawings these are to be preferred and so for consistency I have used them in my decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - (a) whether the proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework and any relevant development plan policies;
 - (b) the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt;
 - (c) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - (d) whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Whether Inappropriate Development

4. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) stipulates that development in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate unless it accords with one of the exceptions set out in either Paragraph 154 or 155 of the Framework. Paragraph 154(c) of the Framework allows for 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. None of the other exceptions set out in the Framework are advanced in relation to this appeal.

5. Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 (LPCS) generally seeks to minimise development in the Green Belt and ensure it accords with national policy. Policy C13 of the Gravesham Local Plan First Review 2014 (LPFR) relates specifically to extensions to dwellings in the countryside, which includes the Green Belt. This policy sets out seven criteria against which proposals will be judged. Whilst these provide a useful indication of local priorities, they pre-date the current Framework and are more restrictive than it. Accordingly, the approach in the Framework is to be preferred, with more limited weight being applied to Policy C13.
6. The Framework defines “original building” as being a building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally. The term ‘disproportionate additions’ is not defined in the Framework and is therefore a planning judgment.
7. The existing building has an external floor area of just over 94m², which includes a small porch that was not part of the original building. Putting the matter of the porch being a previous extension to one side, the current proposal is said to represent an increase of some 86m² of what is termed ‘usable floorspace’.
8. However, the Framework refers to ‘size’, which can reasonably be taken to include such factors as volume, height, external dimensions, visual perception etc. and not just footprint or floorspace. I have not been provided with any figures as to the increase in volume of the building but based on the submitted drawings and my observations on site, it is evident that the proposed building, with its larger footprint, raised eaves height and large hipped roof with dormers, would have a considerably greater height, volume and mass than the existing single storey hipped roof building.
9. The existing dwelling also benefits from single storey outbuildings in the front and rear gardens, which have a combined footprint of some 76m². The garage in the front garden has a large and particularly prominent roof, with a ridge height not too dissimilar to that of the dwelling.
10. It has been held by the Courts that existing curtilage buildings can be considered as part of an assessment under Paragraph 154(c). In my judgement, given their positions and functions, these existing outbuildings could reasonably be considered to be normal domestic adjuncts to the dwelling. Thus, in the context of this appeal they can be taken into account as being previous extensions.
11. Therefore, taking all of the above into account, when considered with the previous enlargements of the dwelling, the proposal would represent a substantial increase in the size of the building. I find that this would be a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building.
12. Therefore, the proposal would be inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. Consequently, the proposal would conflict with Policy CS02 of the LPCS and Policy C13 of the LPFR and with the Framework, which seeks to protect the Green Belt from harm.

Openness

13. Paragraph 142 of the Framework states: 'the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence'. Openness is not defined in the Framework but in determining the nature and extent of any impact on Green Belt openness it is necessary to assess both spatial and visual impacts.
14. In relation to the spatial aspect of openness the extended dwelling would be noticeably larger than the existing building. This would be particularly evident through the additional height and mass of the resultant building. There would be a small but perceptible spatial erosion of openness.
15. Similarly, in relation to the visual aspect to openness, the greater height and mass of the building compared with the existing situation would be readily apparent from Beechwood Drive. Whilst the front boundary and garage would provide some screening of the dwelling itself, the enlarged building would nonetheless be evident from outside the site.
16. Avoiding harm to openness does not necessarily mean that no change can occur. However, whilst the change here would be localised, there would nonetheless be an impact on openness to the extent that there would be a small amount of harm to Green Belt openness. In this respect I also note that the appellant accepts that there would be some spatial impact on openness, albeit this is said to be minimal. As per Paragraph 153 of the Framework, any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to openness, attracts substantial weight.

Character and Appearance

17. Policy CS19 of the LPCS requires new development, amongst other things, to be visually attractive, locally distinctive and that its design, layout and form should be derived from a robust analysis of the local context and character.
18. The appeal site is surrounded by other dwellings but is set within a rural and verdant area. Houses are set around a series of narrow winding roads and present a variety of building styles and layouts.
19. Most but by no means all of the buildings in the immediate vicinity of the site are single storey. However, the shape of the main roof would be similar to other nearby buildings, some of which have also been designed and built to have upper floor accommodation. Thus, whilst the height of the proposed building would give it prominence, it would not be a totally alien feature in this setting.
20. The use of render on the main body of the house would not generally be reflective of the area. However, the dwelling next door is rendered and given the boundary wall and garage, the appeal property having such a finish would have a limited effect on the wider area.
21. Roof dormers are not a particularly evident feature of other houses in the immediate locality. I have been presented with details of a recent extension to a nearby dwelling which has included them, but they are relatively small features on that house. Conversely, in the scheme before me, the proposal involves the addition of two large dormers. By inserting them on to what would be a noticeably large and prominent roof, the effect would be to create a significantly bulky building

whose appearance would then not appear to be derived from a robust analysis of the local context and character.

22. I therefore find that the resulting scale and design of the building would have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policy CS19 of the LPCS, which establishes design principles for development in the borough, including having regard to local context and character.
23. The proposal would also be contrary to Paragraph 135 of the Framework, which amongst other things, seeks to ensure developments are sympathetic to local character.

Other Considerations

24. It is said that the proposal would accord with the Nationally Described Space Standards and not cause harm to neighbours. It would also provide sufficient on-site parking; would not have an impact on the local highway network; nor represent an increased flood risk. However, these factors all represent a lack of harm and so would be neutral considerations in any balance.
25. I have been referred to a sizeable extension the Council has approved to a nearby dwelling. A comparison of the floor areas of the respective houses has also been presented. However, as noted above, Paragraph 154 (c) of the Framework refers to 'size', a term which encompasses more than simply a comparison of floorspace figures. The two dwellings and the resultant changes are not directly comparable in terms of how they would be seen and perceived and exemplify why the consideration of size encompasses more than just a comparison of figures. As such, the weight I attribute to this other decision does not outweigh the harm I have identified above.

Green Belt Balance

26. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. Paragraph 153 of the Framework states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. I have found harm to the Green Belt by reason of the proposed development's inappropriateness. There is also harm to the Green Belt due to the effect on openness. The considerations advanced by the appellant, even when considered together, do not clearly outweigh the totality of the harm.
27. The very special circumstances necessary to justify the development therefore do not exist. Consequently, the proposed development conflicts with Paragraph 153 of the Framework and policies in the LPCS and LPFR, the aims of which are set out above.

Conclusion

28. The proposal does not accord with the development plan and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, to indicate that the appeal should be determined otherwise. Therefore, for the reasons given above, I conclude that this appeal should be dismissed.

Stewart Glassar

INSPECTOR