
GSP PROJECT REF: PR3817.RO

PLANNING STATEMENT

77 BEECHWOOD DRIVE, MEOPHAM, GRAVESEND, KENT DA13 0TX

MAY 2023

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement is prepared in support of the submission of a planning application for the following:

“Part retrospective application for the use of the land for the stationing of 2 mobile homes, and associated landscaping and boundary treatments.”

- 1.2 The land affected by this proposed development is the subject of the following Land Registry title. The land affected is owned by the applicant:

K90760 (77 Beechwood Drive, Meopham, Gravesend DA13 0TX)

2.0 SITE CONTEXT

- 2.1 The application site extending to 1698 sqm is located on the SW side of Beechwood Drive, at the end of Beechwood Gardens. Unusually for this locality the site is flat, but as with much of the Culverstone Valley Area, Beechwood Drive is characterised by an eclectic mix of brick-built bungalows. Much of the Culverstone Valley Area has not been excluded from the Green Belt, despite its unusual evolution which has resulted in a density of dwellings that give the area a village character.

- 2.2 As with most of the Culverstone Valley Area, the plots in this part of Beechwood Drive have a wide variety of boundary treatments, ranging from open frontages to enclosed plots with garages set at the roadside in front of the main dwellings. In this case, 77 Beechwood Drive is unusual insofar that the plot is set back from the road, and has two accesses, from both Beechwood Drive and Beechwood Gardens. Both accesses have secure gates.

- 2.3 To the North of the site lies the property known as Green Hill, 78 Beechwood Drive. This property is set in a large plot and consists of a detached chalet style dwelling central to the site with two garages to the south of the dwelling. To the West of the site lies 7 Beechwood Gardens, which again consists of a detached dwelling with an outbuilding. To the East of the site, on the opposite side of Beechwood Drive lies 19 Beechwood Drive which currently accommodates x3 mobile homes, which appear to be used for residential purposes. No. 20 Beechwood Drive and No. 76 Beechwood Drive to the south / SE both contain chalet style detached dwellings.

- 2.4 Photos of the site and surrounds are attached at **Appendix 1**.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY:

- 3.1 The planning records for the site are detailed on the public access and have been reproduced below:

- Erection of three chalets for weekend and holiday use Ref. No: 19580004 | Status: Application Permitted

- Stationing of caravan for weekend and holiday use Ref. No: 19590270 | Status: Application Permitted
- Outline application for erection of new dwelling with rooms in the roof space and erection of detached garage. Ref. No: 19990872 | Status: Application Refused
- Outline application for the demolition of the existing dwelling and erection of two replacement dwellings. Ref. No: 20110625 | Status: Application Refused
- Outline application for the demolition of the existing dwelling and erection of two replacement dwellings. Ref. No: 2011/00092/REF | Status: Appeal Dismissed
- Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of a detached three-bedroom chalet bungalow and a detached double garage. Ref. No: 20120696 | Status: Application Permitted.

4. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT:

- 4.1** This application seeks retrospective permission for the use of the land for the stationing of a mobile home (shown as Mobile 1 on the existing and proposed block plan), which was moved onto the site and has been occupied by the applicant and her young family since May 2021. As part of this proposal, the applicant would also like to retain the associated landscaping and boundary treatment, as well as the two wooden shed buildings which are used for domestic storage.
- 4.2** In addition to the retrospective element of this application, the applicant is also proposing the stationing of a second mobile home on the site (shown as “proposed new mobile home” on the proposed block plan) for a relative and his family to occupy. The proposed mobile will be the same as the applicants existing mobile home, and it is proposed to provide a similar boundary treatment.
- 4.3** As part of the proposal the two mobile homes on the site (shown as Mobile 2 and 3 on the existing block plan) will be removed. The new proposed mobile home will be placed where they are currently sited. The two mobiles to be removed are older and fairly run down in appearance. The applicant currently uses them as overflow domestic storage, they are not occupied.
- 4.4** The site is more than able to accommodate the two proposed mobile homes and associated landscaping. There is ample room on the site for parking of domestic vehicles, and both accesses into the site are well maintained and suitable. The use of the site is consistent with the surrounding residential uses. The plot itself previously had a single dwelling on it, and this was demolished, following the grant of planning permission for a new dwelling back in 2012. This permission was started within the relevant timeframe and cannot expire, however the applicant would prefer to live on the site, as applied for here. The plot is therefore recognised as “authorised”.

- 4.5 The applicant and her family have lived in the area for a considerable time. The children attend the local primary school, and other close relatives and friends live in the locality. The family are part of the local community and wish to stay on the site on a permanent basis.

5.0 PLANNING POLICIES:

- 5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 require that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Court of Appeal has clarified that for a decision maker this means establishing whether a proposal is in accordance with the development plan.
- 5.2 The question of compliance with one policy should not dictate the outcome of a proposal in the absence of considering compliance with all other relevant policies. Decision makers are therefore tasked with identifying and understanding all relevant policies and material considerations to reach a properly informed planning judgment on a proposal, and to avoid an irrational or vulnerable decision that may be subject to criticism in a public law challenge.
- 5.3 Paragraph 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') reiterates this, whilst paragraph 12 of the Framework is clear that the development plan is the starting point for decision making. Proposed development that accords with an up-to-date Local Plan should be approved, and proposed development that conflicts should be refused unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.4 Paragraph 38 of the Framework encourages local planning authorities to approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. It also encourages working proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social, and environmental conditions of the area, adding that decision-makers should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.
- 5.5 Annex 1 of the Framework confirms that for the purposes of decision-taking, the policies in the plan should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted prior to the publication of the Framework. It adds that due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with the Framework, with greater weight being given to those policies that are closer to the policies in the Framework.

Development Plan

- 5.6 In terms of the Development Plan for Gravesham Borough Council (GBC), this comprises of the following documents that are relevant to this application:
- Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy and Local Plan Policies Map (2014)
 - Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994) – saved Policies

5.7 Within these documents, the following adopted policies are considered relevant:

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale & Distribution of Development
- CS11 – Transport
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Development & Design Principles
- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards
- T1 – Impact of Development on Highway Network

5.8 The main planning issues in this case are:

- Green Belt - VSC
- Sustainable development
- Design and character
- Residential amenity
- Highways considerations

6.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT:

Green Belt:

6.1 The National Planning Policy Framework at paragraphs 137 and 138 clearly sets out the purposes of the Green Belt.

“The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. 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.

138. Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.’*

6.2 In terms of the impact of the currently proposed development on the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF, it is clear that the proposed development will not be contrary to the stated purposes of the Green Belt: It will not add to the sprawl of a large built up area; It will not result in neighbouring towns merging into one another; It will have no impact on the countryside in terms of encroachment; The proposed

development will not extend development into open countryside; It will not have any impact on the setting and special character of a historic town; It will not have any impact on urban regeneration.

- 6.3** It is also necessary to consider whether the proposal constitutes appropriate development in line with the advice of the NPPF and therefore whether it is necessary to demonstrate Very Special Circumstances if it is considered to be inappropriate development. Para 149 sets out that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate. Certain exceptions to this are then detailed. Para 150 then goes on to set out other types of development that should not be regarded as inappropriate:

“Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

- a) mineral extraction;*
- b) engineering operations;*
- c) local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;*
- d) the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;*
- e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and*
- f) development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order”*

- 6.4** Para 150E is relevant in this case. As demonstrated above, the proposal does not conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt and does help to preserve the openness. The change of use of the land for the stationing of mobile homes therefore fits into this description and should therefore be regarded as appropriate.

- 6.5** Without prejudice to the above, if the Council do not consider that the proposal is “appropriate development” in the Green Belt, then the applicant would ask that the following Very Special Circumstances are considered.

- 6.6** There is an extant permission for the construction of a dwelling and associated landscaping at the site. The permanent nature of this permitted dwelling is more harmful to the openness of the Green Belt than this proposal for the stationing of mobile units. The permitted dwelling would be built up higher, and in a more prominent position on the site than the mobile homes. The hardstanding and garden areas of the permitted dwelling would be more harmful in terms of ecology and biodiversity.

- 6.7 As the applicant wishes to remain on the site, there is a real prospect of this extant permission coming forward if permission for the mobile homes cannot be obtained. The applicant however would prefer to live on the site in the mobile homes.

Sustainable Development:

- 6.8 The NPPF, taken as a whole, represents the Government's view of what constitutes sustainable development. Paragraph 80 of the NPPF provides specific advice on sustainable development in rural areas and seeks to avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances.
- 6.9 This proposal is for the use of the land for the siting of mobile units to serve the applicant and her family. These mobile units are a substitute for the permitted dwelling under permission 20120696.
- 6.10 The site is located within the countryside, and it is accepted that public transport provision is poor, however this area of Culverstone is build up with dwellings and, the site itself has already been authorised, in principle, for residential use. It is hoped that public transport provision in this already populated area will improve in the future.
- 6.11 The proposal is therefore not considered to be contrary to paragraph 80 of the NPPF or policy CS01 of Gravesham Core Strategy.

Design and Character:

- 6.12 There is a difference between impacts on visual amenity, which are normally considered within the process of assessing landscape impact and the visual aspects of openness which are considered as part of a Green Belt Assessment. In the former, an assessment is made on the effects of development on the views available to people and their visual amenity and how this may affect character and scenic quality.
- 6.13 The proposal introduces the mobile structures, together with landscaping to the north and western areas of the site. Together these elements enhance the appearance of the site and introduce a more rural character. The development will be seen in the context of the other similar development of adjoining plots, and it will not look out of place. This is not an isolated situation within the countryside where a development might be prominent because it is the only structure in an otherwise open landscape.
- 6.14 Section 12 of the NPPF relates to "achieving well-designed places" and sets out the Government's requirements in relation to design issues. Paragraph 126 relates good design and better places. Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy requires new development to be "visually attractive, fit for purpose and locally distinctive", to "conserve and enhance the character of the local built, historic and natural environment" and "integrate well with the surrounding local area".
- 6.15 The proposed mobile homes will not be visually prominent in the local landscape. The area in which it is located arguably has a village character, with a wide range of sizes and designs of dwellings, all contained within a treed landscape. The proposed mobile homes will integrate well into the local area and conserve and enhance the character

and appearance of the locality. The development responds to the policy recommendations in Harvel Wooded Downs Landscape Character Area which included the softening of new development using characteristic landscape elements.

Neighbour Amenity:

- 6.16** Para 130 in the NPPF states that planning decisions should aim to secure a high standard of amenity for all existing and future users. The impact on amenity is also considered regarding 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.
- 6.17** The surrounding area is primarily detached residential dwellings of varying sizes, usually with domestic outbuildings. These dwellings are already subjected to normal countryside activities and the impacts that arise e.g. noise, smells etc. The addition of the mobile units on this site will not detriment the privacy, daylight, or sunlight of the surrounding properties.
- 6.18** The proposal does not therefore conflict with Policy CS19 or the objectives of the NPPF in relation to amenity.

Highways:

- 6.19** The development does not include the need for any on-street parking. The existing accesses into the site have been utilised and there is more than sufficient parking provided within the site.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS:

- 7.1** The proposal will ensure that the applicant is able to remain on the land with her young family, who are part of the local community. The use of the site will co-exist harmoniously with the surrounding properties and will make good use of an authorised plot in this countryside location.
- 7.2** The proposal is appropriate development in the Green Belt and does not have a significant material impact on the neighbour amenity, environment, character of the area or highways. A case of VSC has been demonstrated if the Council do not consider that the proposal meets the test of appropriateness.
- 7.3** In accordance with paragraphs 11 and 38 of the Framework, and in consideration of all relevant development plan policies and material considerations, this application should be viewed positively by the authority, and it is respectfully requested that this submission is approved.

Appendix 1 – Photographs of the site:



Photo 1 – View looking towards mobile home 1 (to be retained)



Photo 2 – View from eastern access looking towards mobile 1



Photo 3 – View from the site looking towards the eastern access (onto Beechwood Drive)



Photo 4 – View from the site looking towards the western access (onto Beechwood Gardens)



Photo 5 – View of mobile homes 2 and 3 (to be removed)