

PLANNING STATEMENT

Land at 43 Beechwood Drive, Meopham, Kent, DA13 0TX Erection of Replacement Dwelling (Resubmission)

1. Introduction

This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a revised application for the redevelopment of land at 43 Beechwood Drive, Meopham. The proposal seeks full planning permission for the demolition of the existing bungalow and the erection of a replacement single-storey dwelling with associated parking and landscaping.

This application follows the refusal of planning permission under reference 20241045. The current scheme has been carefully and deliberately redesigned to respond directly to the concerns raised by the Local Planning Authority, in particular those relating to Green Belt impact, scale and massing, openness, and landscape character. The revised proposal represents a materially different and significantly more policy-compliant form of development.

2. Site Context and Character

The site lies within the Culverstone Valley area, which is characterised by a loose and sporadic pattern of residential development set within a heavily wooded landscape. The Council's own Landscape Character Assessment identifies the area as forming part of a "haphazard mosaic of residential plots and small holdings set within woodland," reflecting its historic evolution as a piecemeal and irregular settlement pattern.

Development in the locality is notably varied in terms of scale, form and architectural style. While many dwellings originated as modest chalets or bungalows, a number have been extended or redeveloped over time, resulting in a mixed character that includes both single-storey and larger two-storey properties. The prevailing character is therefore not one of strict uniformity, but of variation within a wooded and semi-rural setting.

The application site itself is currently occupied by a modest bungalow positioned toward the rear of the plot, with a substantial proportion of the land remaining open and undeveloped.

3. The Proposed Development

The revised scheme proposes a single-storey replacement dwelling of modest scale and simple design. The building adopts a low-profile form with a ridge height of approximately 4.75 metres, significantly reducing its visual presence when compared to the previously refused scheme.

The layout has been carefully considered to ensure that the dwelling remains compact and efficient, with a gross internal area of approximately 100 square metres. The design approach is intentionally restrained, avoiding complex roof forms or excessive bulk, and instead presenting a simple, domestic form that sits comfortably within the plot.

In addition, the scheme retains a generous proportion of open space across the site, with landscaping proposed to reinforce the wooded character of the area and to soften the visual appearance of the development.

4. Planning Policy Context

The Development Plan comprises the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) and saved policies from the Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994), alongside the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). Of particular relevance are policies relating to Green Belt protection, replacement dwellings in the countryside, design quality, and landscape character.

While Saved Policy C12 seeks to restrict the scale of replacement dwellings, it is well established that such policies must be applied in a manner consistent with the NPPF, which requires a broader assessment based on planning judgement, visual impact and openness, rather than strict numerical thresholds alone.

5. Principle of Development

The site is in established residential use, and the proposal does not introduce a new use but instead replaces an existing dwelling. As such, the principle of development is acceptable, subject to compliance with Green Belt policy and other relevant considerations.

6. Green Belt Assessment

The key issue in the determination of this application is whether the proposed replacement dwelling constitutes inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Paragraph 154(d) of the NPPF permits the replacement of a building provided that the new building is in the same use and is not materially larger than the one it replaces.

It is important to emphasise that the question of whether a building is “materially larger” is not a purely mathematical exercise. Rather, it is a matter of planning judgement, taking into account factors such as visual impact, scale, massing, and the spatial and visual openness of the site. This approach has been consistently supported by appeal decisions and case law, including the principles established in *Warwick District Council v Secretary of State* (2022), which confirmed that such assessments should not be reduced to rigid percentage comparisons.

In this context, a highly significant material consideration is the recent planning permission granted at the immediately adjoining property, No. 42 Beechwood Drive. In that case, the Council accepted a development which resulted in a substantial increase in floorspace—approximately 217% over the original dwelling—and which introduced a two-storey form with considerable roof volume and visual presence.

Despite this, the Council concluded that the development did not result in disproportionate additions when assessed visually, and that it complied with Green Belt policy. That decision clearly demonstrates that the Local Planning Authority applies a qualitative, visual assessment rather than a strict numerical one when determining whether development is materially larger.

When the current proposal is assessed against that benchmark, it is evident that it is significantly more restrained. The proposed dwelling is single storey, with a reduced ridge height and a simple, low-profile form. Its visual impact is materially less than that of the approved development at No. 42, both in terms of scale and prominence within the site.

In these circumstances, it would be inconsistent and unreasonable to conclude that the current proposal causes unacceptable harm to the Green Belt when a materially larger and more visually prominent development has been accepted on the adjoining site.

7. Saved Policy C12

Saved Policy C12 requires replacement dwellings to be of a similar scale and mass to the existing building, unless a modest enlargement can be justified. While the proposal does represent an increase over the existing dwelling, it is important to recognise that this policy predates the NPPF and must be applied flexibly.

The Council's own decision at No. 42 demonstrates that strict adherence to percentage limits is neither required nor appropriate where the visual impact of the development is acceptable. In that case, a very substantial increase was considered compliant when assessed in the context of design, scale and character.

The current proposal is materially smaller, lower in height, and less visually intrusive. It therefore represents a proportionate and policy-compliant form of development when assessed against both local and national policy.

8. Impact on Openness

The previous refusal placed considerable weight on the perceived impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt, particularly in relation to the siting of the dwelling and the extent of hardstanding.

The revised scheme has been designed to address these concerns. The dwelling is modest in scale and remains visually contained within the plot, while significant areas of open space are retained. The overall perception of the site as a spacious, lightly developed plot is therefore preserved.

It is also relevant to note that openness has both spatial and visual dimensions. In this case, the reduced height and simplified form of the proposed dwelling result in a development that is far less visually intrusive than the previously refused scheme, and materially less impactful than the approved development at No. 42.

When assessed in this context, the proposal does not result in any meaningful harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

9. Landscape Character

The site lies within the Harvel Wooded Downs Landscape Character Area, which is characterised by a mixture of woodland, small plots and varied residential development.

The Council's own assessment acknowledges the presence of a fragmented and evolving pattern of development within this area.

The proposed dwelling has been designed to sit comfortably within this context. Its low profile, simple form and use of landscaping ensure that it integrates with the surrounding environment and does not appear dominant or out of character.

Indeed, when compared to the previously refused scheme, the revised proposal represents a clear improvement in terms of design, scale and relationship to the landscape.

10. Biodiversity

The previous refusal identified the absence of ecological information as a concern. This matter can be readily addressed through the submission of an Ecological Impact Assessment, including a Preliminary Roost Assessment for bats, or alternatively through the imposition of an appropriately worded planning condition.

There is no reason in principle why this issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved by a condition whereby no works at all are commenced before the pre-commencement condition relating to the above is approved.

11. Planning Balance and Conclusion

This application presents a significantly revised and improved scheme that has been specifically designed to address the concerns raised in the previous refusal. The proposal is modest in scale, carefully designed, and well suited to its context.

Crucially, the Council has already accepted a materially larger and more visually prominent development at the immediately adjoining property. That decision confirms that the assessment of replacement dwellings within the Green Belt must be based on planning judgement, with particular regard to visual impact and context, rather than rigid numerical comparisons.

The current proposal is clearly more restrained in scale, lower in height, and less visually intrusive than the approved neighbouring development. It follows that a refusal of this application would not only conflict with national policy and established appeal principles, but would also result in an inconsistent and unreasonable decision when assessed against the Council's own recent decision-making.

In these circumstances, the proposal accords with the Development Plan when read as a whole and with the National Planning Policy Framework. Planning permission should therefore be granted.

12. Recommendation

It is respectfully requested that planning permission be approved.