



Delegated Report

Full Planning Application

Planning Application No:	20231042
Location:	The Chestnuts, Wrotham Road, Meopham, Gravesend
Description:	Retrospective permission for the erection of an outbuilding in the grounds of the care home.
Applicant:	Mr J Read

Submitted Documents/Plans

Application form
Drawing no. BDS-CH-P20 Rev. A (Plans for Garden Room)
Drawing no. BDS-CH-P21 (Block Plan and Site Location Plan)

Relevant Planning History

Reference	Description	Decision	Decision Date
20230457	Addition of 1no bedroom to 2nd floor and erection of outbuilding for staff accommodation.	Refused	13.07.2023
20110103	Erection of single storey side extension to form a kitchen and a day room.	Permitted	28.03.2011
19880295	Erection of 2 no three storey rear extensions each comprising of additional bedrooms, wc, laundry rms office & extension to self-contained accommodation at 2nd floor level & continued use of premises as a retirement home for the elderly and as a private registered nursing home.	Permitted	14.09.1988
19850039	Erection of two storey extension on north side to form additional old persons accommodation comprising six bedrooms and two bathrooms erection of double garage at rear and formation of car parking area	Permitted	21.03.1985
19840511	Erection of single storey extension at side to form enlarged kitchen and erection of external fire escape to elderly persons rest home	Permitted	24.09.1984
19840068	Change of use of ground floor and first floor to rest home for elderly people and second floor as owners flat requiring the erection of two external staircases	Permitted	06.04.1984

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale and Distribution of Development
- CS10 – Physical and Social Infrastructure

- CS11 – Transport
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS14 – Housing Type and Size
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Development and Design Principles

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- T1 – Impact of Development on the Highway Network
- T5 – Access to the Identified Highway Network
- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards

Paragraph 33 of the NPPF (2023) 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 (2023), the Council will also seek to replace these.

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

- 2 – Achieving sustainable development
- 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities
- 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
- 11 – Making effective use of land
- 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places.
- 13 – Protecting Green Belt land
- 14 - Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- SPG4 – KCC Parking Standards (2006)
- Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

External Consultees

Dickens' Country Protection Society

The Society would comment that the site is in an area within which Green Belt policies apply where new development would not normally be permitted. No very special circumstances have been put forward that would warrant overriding Green Belt policy.

Internal Consultees

GBC Highways

Providing the Garden Room cannot be used for overnight accommodation and there is no increase in staff or residents, I have no objections.

Neighbouring properties

Five neighbouring properties were notified about the proposal and the application has been advertised on site. The overall consultation period expired on 5 December 2023.

No letters of representation have been received from neighbouring properties.

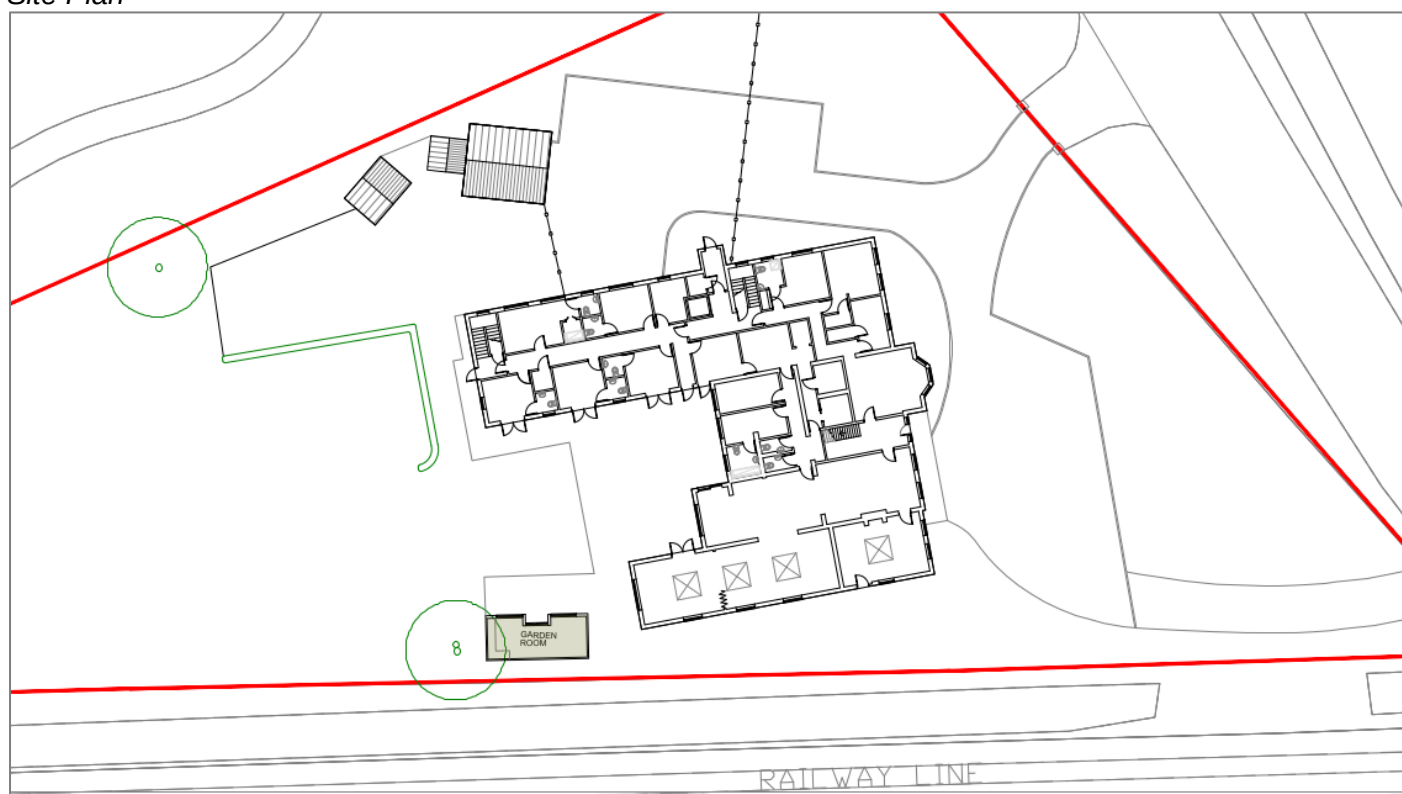
Meopham Parish Council and Local Ward Councillors were also consulted, and no responses were received.

Officer's Analysis

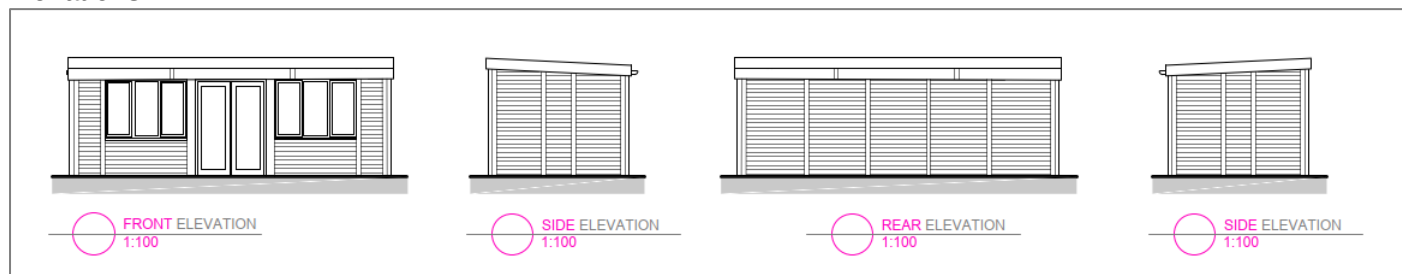
Proposal

This application seeks retrospective permission for the erection of an outbuilding in the grounds of the care home, to the rear of the main building alongside the southern boundary with the railway line.

Site Plan



Elevations



Floor Plan



The floor plans show the building as a 'garden room'.

Principle Issues

The site comprises an established care home immediately adjoining (but outside) the Hook Green Meopham settlement boundary. Policy CS10 of the Core Strategy 2014 gives support to proposals that protect, retain or enhance existing physical and social infrastructure. Policy CS14 also states that "sheltered housing and extra care housing for people with special needs will be supported on suitable sites in areas with access to a range of services that provide for the needs of future occupants". It is considered that as the site is a care home that has been in operation since the 1980s, the use has been clearly established on site.

The site lies outside the settlement boundary in the countryside, in the Green Belt and in the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area. Taking these designations into account, the main issues for consideration in the determination of this application are as follows:

- Principle of development in the Green Belt
- Impact on openness
- Design
- Landscape character

There are no residential amenity or highways issues due to the distance from residential properties and lack of parking or access changes.

Principle of development in the Green Belt

The site lies within the Green Belt. Green Belts are of great importance. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by preserving the open and permanent characteristics of Green Belts (paragraph 142 of the NPPF 2023). Paragraph 152 of the NPPF 2023 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy 2014 prioritises development in the urban area as a sustainable location for development. In the rural area it 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 (which is the case here), will only be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in the Core Strategy 2014.

Local Planning Authorities should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt (paragraph 154 of the NPPF 2023). However, there are exceptions to this which, as in the case of this proposal, include:

(g) the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development or would not cause substantial harm to openness and would contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need.

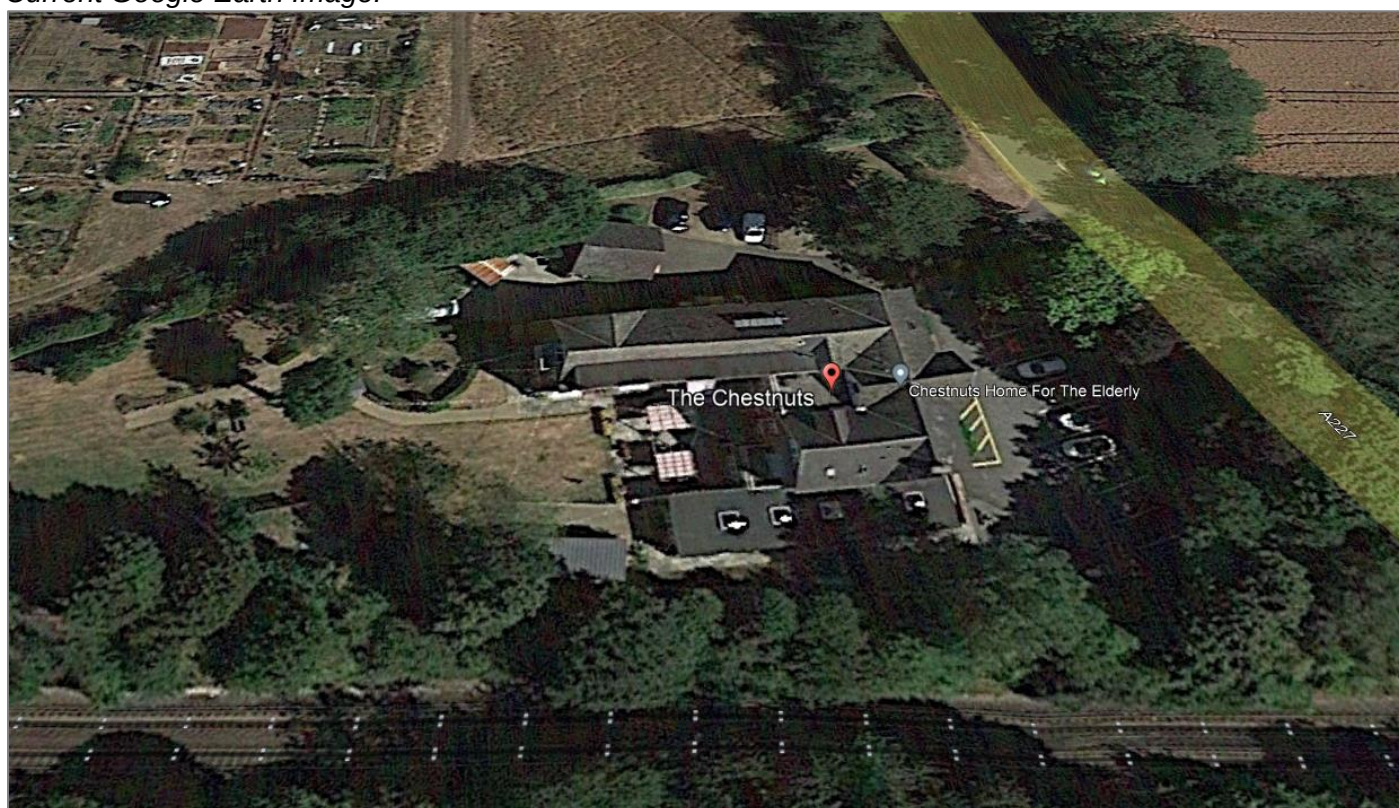
As a care home site and being previously developed land, the proposal for a garden room in a detached outbuilding would fall to be considered under paragraph 154 (g). In this regard, the impact on openness should be assessed in terms of determining the appropriateness of the proposal in the Green Belt.

Impact on Openness

Paragraph 142 of the NPPF 2023 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. Paragraph 001 of the Planning Practice Guidance 2019 on Green Belts looks to assess the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt by taking into account the spatial and visual aspects of a development, its duration and remediability, and the activity levels generated.

The site comprises the main care home building with detached various detached outbuildings around it to the north and a parking area to the front and side. Wrotham Road (the A227) runs along the eastern boundary, the train line is to the south and Meopham Allotments are to the north.

Current Google Earth Image:



The proposed outbuilding was in an area of the site that was void of any development:

Google Earth Image May 2018:



In both spatial and visual terms, by reason of the permanent nature of the building and the increase in the spread of built development across the site, this would clearly result in a loss of openness. In addition, as the site lies outside any settlement boundary, the development would represent an encroachment into the countryside, which is contrary to the purposes of including land within the Green Belt (paragraph 143 of the NPPF 2023), and Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy 2014, which only supports development outside settlement boundaries where it is compatible with national and local policies for protecting the Green Belt. Safeguarding the countryside by minimising the expansion of the Borough's rural settlements is a stated local purpose of the Green Belt as set out at paragraph 4.2.7 of the Core Strategy 2014.

It is recognised that the outbuilding is seen within the context of the existing buildings and boundary of the care home and is screened from any public vantage point by its position to the rear of the main building and by landscaping. This does limit and localise the impact on openness. However, the outbuilding is away from the main existing building and is an incursion into open land. When considered spatially, the proposal would result in built form where previously no building existed. It must also be considered that the care home has an extensive history of extensions to the main building that have impacted and reduced the openness of the site over time. Even a limited and localised adverse effect on openness contributes to harm to the Green Belt, and for this reason openness is compromised and harm from the development therefore occurs. Paragraph 153 of the NPPF 2023 states that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. There has been no case for special circumstances put forward to try to justify the proposal to outweigh such harm.

As the proposal has a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt, the outbuilding is considered to be inappropriate development and should be refused on this basis in accordance with the policy requirements of the NPPF 2023 and CS02 of the Core Strategy 2014.

Landscape Character

Paragraph 180 of the NPPF 2023 aims for development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Core Strategy 2014 is also relevant to this application, relating to green infrastructure. This policy states that the overall landscape character of the Borough will be conserved, restored and enhanced and that the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (GLCA) 2009 will be taken into account in determining applications. The site is located within the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area, where topography is gently undulating with a mixture of arable and pasture farmland. The overall condition of the landscape is good and has moderate sensitivity. It is recommended that key landscape elements should be conserved and reinforced.

The outbuilding is within the established care home grounds, and the development is seen only within this context. Given the siting of the outbuilding, any wider views from the character area are limited and are viewed against the backdrop of the existing development and well-established green boundaries.

The development would not therefore have an adverse effect on the rural character of the wider area, considering its care home setting. The site does not contribute to the distinctive features identified within the GLCA and is unlikely to add to those features as it would remain part of the care home grounds.

The proposal does not have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area and would comply with Policy CS12 of the Core Strategy, which seeks to conserve, restore or enhance the landscape character of areas identified within the GLCA.

Design

Development Plan policy places considerable emphasis on the importance of achieving high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places (paragraph 131 of the NPPF 2023). Paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2023 seeks to ensure that development will add to the quality of an area, be visually attractive, and sympathetic to local character and history. Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014 reflects these aims and requires that new development is well designed and respects the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

In terms of the design of the outbuilding, its appearance is satisfactory for a such building in the garden.

The proposal is therefore considered to be in keeping with the character and appearance of the site and sympathetic to the surrounding built environment. The proposal would therefore accord with the design requirements of Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy and paragraph 135 of the NPPF 2023.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The outbuilding is considered to be inappropriate in the Green Belt due to its greater impact on the openness of the site. There are no special circumstances that have been put forward to outweigh the harm to openness. The application should be refused on the following grounds:

The outbuilding is considered to be inappropriate and harmful due to its greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the pre-existing development, which was in an area void of any built form. There are no special circumstances that exist that would outweigh this harm. The proposal is therefore contrary to the requirements of Policy CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 and paragraphs 152, 153 and 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2023.

(For reason for refusal and informatives, see draft Decision)

Case Officer:	Mrs Katherine Parkin	Team Leader:	Richard Hart
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Signed:	<i>K. Parkin</i>	Signed:	<i>R Hart</i>
Dated:	8 January 2023	Dated:	8th January 2024