



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 September 2025

by A James BSc (Hons) MA MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6th November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/K2230/D/25/3362502

2 Church Cottages, Wrotham Road, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent DA13 0AB

- 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 A Smith against the decision of Gravesham Borough Council.
 - The application reference is 20241079.
 - The development proposed is replacement garage (including agricultural store) and reconfiguration of the property access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal site lies within a conservation area and forms part of the setting of nearby listed buildings. As a result, I have had special regard to sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
3. The appeal site forms part of the setting of a Grade I listed church. As a result of the evidence before me and my site visit, and in addition to the reasons for refusal in the Council's decision notice, I have elevated this matter to a main issue. Both main parties have had the opportunity to comment and I have taken all comments received into consideration.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to any relevant development plan policies and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework);
 - the effect of the proposed development on the openness of the Green Belt; and,
 - whether the proposal would preserve the setting of nearby listed buildings and the character or appearance of The Street, Meopham Rural Conservation Area; and,
 - if the proposal is inappropriate development, would the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, be clearly outweighed by other considerations as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

5. The appeal property is a semi-detached dwelling, which is sited outside of the settlement confines of Meopham and within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The proposal seeks to demolish an existing detached garage and provide a new garage and agricultural store, further away from the dwelling. The proposal also seeks to reconfigure the existing access.
6. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Substantial weight should be given to any harm, and 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.
7. My attention has not been drawn to any specific policies within the Council's development plan, which relate to domestic outbuildings/garages within the Green Belt. However, the development plan requires that the policies within the Framework are taken into account.
8. The construction of a new building is deemed to be inappropriate development within the Green Belt, unless it meets one of the exceptions set out within paragraph 154 of the Framework. The appellant has assessed the proposal against exceptions a) buildings for agriculture and forestry and 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.
9. The proposal seeks to provide a double garage, with the plans showing an additional area to be used for garden storage. Domestic storage is also proposed within the roof space. While the proposed building may be used to store equipment used to maintain the adjacent agricultural land, the building is primarily a domestic outbuilding. Furthermore, the entrance to the proposed 'agricultural store' faces towards and better relates to the domestic garden of the appeal property, rather than the agricultural land on the other side. Given the above, I do not find that the proposal falls within exception 154 a) of the Framework.
10. The proposal is not for an extension or alteration of a building, but for an entirely new building, which would be sited some distance away from the existing dwelling. As a result, I do not find that it falls within exception 154 c) of the Framework.
11. In addition, exception 154 d) relates to the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces. Both main parties agree that the footprint of the proposed garage would be 105% larger than the existing garage. While the proposal would be sited on lower land than the existing garage, it would have a higher and bulkier roof form and would be materially larger than the building it would replace. Consequently, it would fail to accord with the exception set out at paragraph 154 d) of the Framework.
12. The proposal would not fall within any of the other exceptions listed in paragraphs 154 and 155 of the Framework. The proposal is therefore inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. The

proposal would therefore conflict with the Framework which seeks to protect the Green Belt. The proposal would also fail to accord with Policies CS01 and CS02 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy September 2014 (the Core Strategy). These policies among other things require that specific policies in the Framework which indicate development should be restricted must be taken into account and that the Green Belt is protected.

Openness

13. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt that has spatial as well as visual aspects. The proposed garage, by reason of its increase in footprint and volume would result in a spatial loss of openness.
14. While the proposal would be sited on lower land than the existing garage, it would be significantly larger in size, higher in height and would have a bulkier roof form. The proposed garage would be sited closer to the public highway than the existing garage and necessitate the removal of some of the existing soft landscaping. While some existing landscaping would be retained and new planting is proposed, it would take some time to mature. Nevertheless, views of the proposal would be available along the driveway and above the boundary treatment/soft landscaping. I appreciate that the existing garage is visible from the public realm; however, it is modest in size and clearly subservient to the existing dwelling. In this case, I find that the proposed garage would result in a more harmful loss of visual openness to the Green Belt when compared to the existing. Accordingly, the proposal would conflict with the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy set out in the Framework, which is to keep land permanently open.

Heritage assets

15. 'Church Cottages' is a Grade II listed building, which dates back to the 17th century (Ref: 1054716). While it appears from the evidence before me that it was historically one dwelling, it now consists of a pair of semi-detached dwellings. Church Cottages is positioned close to the highway and opposite a Church. It is a timber framed building, which is finished in a mix of brick and render and has a tiled roof. The building has been extended on either side and No 2 Church Cottages has been substantially renovated.
16. Based on my site visit and the evidence before me, I find that the special interest of the listed building as a whole, insofar as is relevant to this appeal is derived from its historic and architectural interest as an illustration of 17th century domestic architecture. The building's relatively modest size, use of traditional materials, its relationship with the Church opposite and its rural setting make important contributions in these regards.
17. The proposal by reason of its size and height would result in a substantial sized new building, which would appear uncharacteristically large when compared with the relatively diminutive size of the listed building. Although the ridge height would be below that of the listed building and the proposal would utilise traditional materials, the floor plan of the proposed garage would be a similar size to that of the host property, which has been substantially extended. While the proposed garage would be sited further away from the listed building and on lower land than the existing garage, given its bulk and size, I find that it would fail to be subservient to the listed building and would harm the setting of this designated heritage asset. The appellant argues that the proposed 'barn hip' roof form, would better relate to

the site's rural agricultural context when compared to the double pitched valley roof on the existing garage. However, I find the proposal would result in a substantially bulkier roof formation. Furthermore, the proposal by reason of its design would not be read as an agricultural barn, but rather as a large, domestic outbuilding.

18. The appeal site is located on the opposite side of the road to 'Parish Church of St John the Baptist', which is a Grade I listed building (Ref: 1039866). The Church dates back to the early 14th century and is constructed of ragstone and flint and is in a Perpendicular style. The Church has been subject to alterations, particularly during the 19th century, which included an extension to the tower and refurbishment of the chancel. The Church's special interest and significance insofar as is relevant to this appeal are mainly derived from its historic and architectural interest as a 14th century ecclesiastical building. Important contributors in these regards are its surviving historic fabric, use of traditional materials, its crenelated tower and large chancel.
19. Pertinent to the appeal, the Church's significance is also derived, in part, from its setting. Its immediate setting, comprising its enclosed graveyard, has direct physical, visual, functional and historic links with the asset. This tranquil space contributes considerably to how the Church is experienced and its significance. The Church's wider setting, including the surrounding historic environment and the green and verdant landscape contribute in a meaningful and positive way to its significance and reinforces its high status as a Grade I listed building of exceptional interest.
20. The proposal would result in a new modern, detached building within the setting of the Church, which would be considerably larger in size than the existing garage. While it would be set slightly further away from the Church than the existing garage and on lower land, it would be sited opposite the entrance to the churchyard. The proposal by reason of its size and design would introduce a substantial sized new building within the setting of the Church, which would not appear ancillary to the dwelling in which it relates. I appreciate that there is a modern church hall adjacent to the Church. Nevertheless, the church hall is clearly ancillary to the Church and has community benefits and is therefore materially different to the appeal scheme before me. The proposal would harmfully diminish the contribution that the Church's setting makes to its significance and how the asset is experienced.
21. The appeal site lies within The Street, Meopham Rural Conservation Area (CA). The CA is centred around the Church and contains a multitude of high quality historic buildings, which are set within a predominantly rural and agricultural landscape. The significance of the CA, insofar as is relevant to this appeal derives from the high quality architecture within it and its green and verdant character.
22. The proposal would result in a large, detached garage which would be substantial in size and compete with the host dwelling. For the reasons set out above, I find that the proposal would introduce a modern and bulky form of development into the CA, which would fail to relate well or appear subservient to the existing dwelling. I do not find that the existing and proposed planting would mitigate this harm. Accordingly, the proposal would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the CA.

Heritage balance

23. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal scheme fails to preserve the setting of the nearby listed buildings and the character and appearance of the CA, as a whole. In this case, I find the harm to the character and appearance of the CA and the setting of Church Cottages and the Parish Church of St John the Baptist to be 'less than substantial' and at the lower end of the scale. However, this should not be equated with a less than substantial planning objection and is of considerable importance and weight. Paragraph 215 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the appeal scheme, including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
24. The proposal would provide a larger garage, which would more easily accommodate modern-sized vehicles and provide secure storage for the equipment used to maintain the appellant's garden and the adjacent agricultural land. Given the diminutive size of the existing dwelling, storage space is limited and the proposal would also provide additional storage within the roof space of the new building. However, these are solely private benefits.
25. Turning to the public benefits, there would be a small economic benefit during the construction works, which I give limited weight as a public benefit. The proposal seeks to install a rainwater harvesting system; however, such environmental benefits are expected with a development of this kind and I give this environmental benefit very limited weight in my decision. The proposal seeks to close off an existing access, which the appellant advises has compromised visibility. However, there is no compelling evidence before me in respect to any alleged highway safety benefit that would arise. The proposal would also remove an area of hardstanding and modern brick structures and return it to lawn and planting, which would have a small environmental and visual benefit. Nevertheless, the alleged highway safety and environmental benefits could be secured by a replacement garage of an alternative and less bulky design, which would not result in the level of harm identified above. Accordingly, I give these matters limited weight in my decision.
26. The appellant argues that the current garage has privacy and security issues, which has resulted in burglaries and trespassing on the site. However, I find that as the proposed garage would be sited further away from the existing dwelling, it would have less natural surveillance than the existing garage and I do not find a security benefit in this regard.
27. There is no substantive evidence that the appeal scheme is necessary in order to secure the optimum viable use of the asset. Overall, the public benefits carry limited weight in favour of the development and are insufficient to outweigh the considerable importance and weight afforded to the conservation of heritage assets.
28. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal scheme fails to preserve the setting of the listed buildings and the character and appearance of the CA. The appeal scheme fails to accord with the requirements of the Act and the historic environment policies of the Framework. The proposal also conflicts with Policy CP20 of the Core Strategy. This policy among other things requires that a high priority is given towards the preservation, protection and enhancement of the heritage and historic environment.

Other considerations

29. The Council granted planning permission for a new garage, which included a reconfigured access in 2021¹. However, this application has now time expired. I am advised that the relevant development plan policies have not changed since consent was granted in 2021 and that the appeal scheme would be sited in a similar location, have similar proportions and a less complex roof formation than the previously consented scheme. However, the appeal proposal has a higher and bulkier roof form than the previously consented garage. It also appears from the plans before me that the appeal proposal has a larger floor plan than the previously consented scheme. Consequently, it is not directly comparable and I give it limited weight in my decision.

Green Belt Balance

30. The proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The proposal would also cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt, the setting of nearby listed buildings and the character and appearance of the CA. Overall, I afford the other considerations advanced in this case limited weight in favour of the development. Consequently, I find that they do not clearly outweigh the substantial weight that I give to the harm to the Green Belt, by reason of inappropriateness and harm to openness and the considerable importance and weight that I give to the preservation of heritage assets. The very special circumstances required to justify the development therefore do not exist.

Other Matters

31. The appellant has drawn my attention to saved Policy C13 of the Local Plan First Review 1994. This policy among other things requires that proposals for domestic garages in the countryside are subservient to the scale of the main dwelling on the plot. For the reasons set out above, I do not find that the proposal would be subservient to the host dwelling. Accordingly, the proposal would also fail to comply with Policy C13 of the Local Plan First Review 1994.

Conclusion

32. For the reasons given above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other material considerations, including the Framework, that would outweigh that conflict. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A James

INSPECTOR

¹ Ref: 20210899