



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 January 2018

by H Lock BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 11 January 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/K2230/D/17/3184668

Purvil Wood Cottage, Leywood Road, Meopham, Gravesend, DA13 0UH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Craig Murphy against the decision of Gravesham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref. 20160955, dated 30 September 2016, was refused by notice dated 24 August 2017.
 - The development proposed is to demolish existing conservatory. Construction of a single and double storey extension to the south end of the building to form new living and bedroom with en-suite. Addition of a new entrance door and canopy to the west side.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The description of development in the heading above has been taken from the planning application form, although in Part E of the appeal form a different wording has been entered. Neither of the main parties has provided written confirmation that a revised description of development was agreed, and I have therefore used the one given on the original application.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are (1) whether the proposal would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt (GB) for the purposes of planning policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and the development plan; (2) whether it would affect the openness of the GB and the purposes of including land within it, and the character and appearance of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Harvel Wooded Downs Landscape Character Area (LCA); and (3) if the development is inappropriate, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development.

Reasons

Whether the Proposal Constitutes Inappropriate Development

4. The appeal property is located in the GB, and amongst other criteria, Policy C13 of the Gravesham Local Plan First Review 1994 (LP) imposes an overall limit on dwelling extensions within the GB to one third of the gross floor area of the original dwelling (measured externally) prior to any later extension or

alteration, unless the increased floor space has no overall effect on the existing bulk and appearance of the dwelling. Although national policy does not specify a set figure, the aim of Policy C13 is broadly consistent with the Framework, which advises that the extension or alteration of a building is not inappropriate in the GB provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

5. The parties confirm that the property was converted from two cottages, with extensions, one of which is a conservatory that would be demolished. The appellant does not dispute the Council's floor space calculations but seeks the inclusion of 6.17 sqm. of original floor space¹ that was demolished when the building was modernised. Whilst I note the appellant's view that this would render the proposal not disproportionate, he nevertheless accepts that its overall size would exceed the allowance specified in LP Policy C13. In my opinion, with or without the inclusion of the demolished floor space, the proposal would exceed the policy limit by some margin.
6. Although an increase in floor space is a useful indicator, it is only one measure of the impact of a development. The existing conservatory is single storey and of largely glazed construction. The proposed two-storey extension would materially increase the bulk and perceived size and scale of the dwelling. Although it would be recessed behind the eastern façade of the dwelling, as a result of its size, height and form it would nevertheless be a notable addition. Whether considered by floor area or visually, as a matter of fact and degree, the cumulative impact of the proposal and previous extension would appear excessive and disproportionate to the size of the original dwelling.
7. I therefore conclude that the proposal would constitute inappropriate development that is, by definition, harmful to the GB, and would conflict with the aims of the Framework, LP Policy C13 and Core Strategy² (CS) Policies CS02 which supports development compatible with national policies for protecting the GB, and CS19, which amongst other criteria seeks to conserve and enhance the character of the local built and natural environment. In accordance with paragraph 88 of the Framework, this harm would have substantial weight.

Effect on Openness, the AONB and LCA

8. As well as being within the GB, the appeal site is set within the sensitive rural landscape of the Kent Downs AONB and the Harvel Wooded Downs Landscape Character Area. The statutory purpose of AONBs is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, and paragraph 115 of the Framework confirms that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in areas including AONBs, which have the highest status of protection. This is reflected in CS Policy CS12.
9. The principle of extending the dwelling in this part of the site has been accepted in the construction of the existing conservatory. However, whilst the footprint of the replacement extension would be less than the existing, it would result in the creation of a larger and bulkier building. Although there is boundary screening, the extended dwelling would be visible from the public domain in gaps across the driveway and field gate, and would not be as

¹ Two external toilet blocks

² Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014

secluded as indicated by the appellant. The extension would increase the prominence of the dwelling when viewed from outside of the site. In this context the resultant increase in the size of the building would reduce the openness of the GB at this point.

10. The CS notes that the AONB retains a downland character and its woodlands are also highly valued. Within this wider landscape is the Harvel Wooded Downs Character Area, and one of its characteristics noted in the associated Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment 2009 is that of the haphazard mosaic of residential plots and small holdings set within the woodland. In the context of conserving these valued landscapes, the increased size and scale of the appeal property would detract from this setting and the rural character of the area.
11. I conclude that the proposal would be harmful to the GB by reason of inappropriate development, but that there would be additional harm arising from the effect of the proposal on its openness, and the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB and LCA. The adverse impacts would undermine the purposes of including land within the GB, and would conflict with the aims of the Framework, LP Policy C13 and CS Policies CS02, CS19 and CS12.

Other Considerations

12. The Framework advises that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, and that 'very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the GB by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. I now turn to the arguments made in support of the proposal.
13. The appellant advises that the proposal seeks to replace the fourth bedroom that was sacrificed to provide indoor bathroom facilities when the property was modernised. LP Policy C13 supports extensions which provide essential basic amenities such as a bathroom, toilet or kitchen, which are currently not available or are clearly inadequate. However, this does not apply to the current house, and indeed the Council's report advises that the property was previously large enough to provide a bathroom without basic living conditions being compromised. Moreover, I note that the property was extended as part of the modernisation, and a replacement bedroom could feasibly have been provided elsewhere. As such I have given this factor limited weight in my assessment.
14. The demolished floor space of external toilet accommodation is noted, but the size of the proposed extension would be much greater than this lost floor space. In any event, from the photographs supplied these single storey structures would not have had the same visual impact as the proposed extension. I have therefore placed weight on the inclusion of this demolished floor space in calculations, but in practice it has limited effect in my assessment.
15. The appellant's modernisation and conversion of the former cottages to improve its standards are noted, but it not evident that the property would be deficient without an extension of the size and form proposed. This factor therefore has limited weight.

16. The reconfiguration of the layout to provide a new entrance door in the western elevation, and the provision of a ground floor wc, could be undertaken without this proposal and are therefore neutral factors.
17. The appellant advises that the design and detailing of the proposed extension would be more in keeping with the property than the conservatory to be replaced. The sash windows would be compatible, but the extensive glazing in the southern elevation and the crown roof form would be no more sympathetic to the host dwelling, and this does not add weight in support of the proposal.
18. The generous size of the appeal site and the lack of any adverse impact on neighbouring properties are noted. However, these are not mitigating criteria set out in national and local planning policy.
19. The appellant has identified a number of properties which have been extended, including some figures, approximations and assessment. However, limited details have been supplied of those extensions, the planning permissions granted, and the policy frameworks against which they were assessed. In the absence of such information, I cannot make a meaningful comparison with the appeal proposal, and as such these examples offer limited support in this appeal.
20. The absence of objections from the Parish Council and local residents is noted but is not a determinative factor.

Green Belt Balancing Exercise and Conclusion

21. The Framework establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, and part of its environmental strand is to contribute to protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment. A core planning principle of the Framework includes the aim to protect Green Belts and to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, but for the reasons given above the proposal would not comply with this principle and would not be sustainable development supported through the Framework.
22. Having balanced the various matters, other considerations do not clearly outweigh the harm to the GB by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, and the conflict with national and local planning policy. The very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist, and I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

H Lock

INSPECTOR