



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 March 2018

by Cullum J A Parker BA(Hons) MA MRTPI IHBC

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

Decision date: 13 April 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/D/18/3194013

Woodfield Cottage, Woodfield Lane, Brookmans Park, AL9 6JJ

- 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 Ms Sue McCormick against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2017/1962/HOUSE, dated 29 August 2017, was refused by notice dated 27 November 2017.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as '*2-storey front extension and gable front to partially replace flat roof & alteration to form pitched roof to garage*'.
 - The development proposed is described on the decision notice and appeal form as: '*Erection of two storey front extension and gable front and alterations to form pitched roof to garage*'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The Appellant indicates they agree with the change in description given on the Council's decision notice. Neither description appears to materially alter the nature of the proposal before me, which I have considered on the basis of the submitted plans. For the avoidance of doubt, I have used the proposal description given on the decision notice and appeal form.

Main Issues

3. The main parties agree that the appeal site is located within the Green Belt. As such, the main issues are:
 - Whether the proposed development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of the *National Planning Policy Framework* and the adopted Development Plan, and;
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the street scene,
 - If the proposal is inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances needed to justify it.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

4. The *National Planning Policy Framework* (the Framework) sets out national policy on Green Belts, and is an important material consideration. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. Paragraph 87 of the Framework indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. In local policy terms, the Green Belt policies of the Framework are broadly reflected in Saved Policies GBSP1, GBSP2 and RA3 of the *Hatfield District Plan 2005 (HDP)*.
5. Paragraphs 89 and 90 of the Framework indicate limited exceptions to inappropriate development. With regard to those listed in Paragraph 90, the exceptions are of limited relevance in this case and it is not suggested by the parties that the proposal would fall into any of those exceptions. I concur.
6. Paragraph 89, sets out exceptions to inappropriate development which includes bullet point 3; *'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'*. Saved Policy RA3 of the HDP seeks a similar aim, albeit worded slightly differently.
7. What would represent a 'disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original dwelling' or not is not defined in either the Framework or the HDP. The dimensions contained within the Council's statement indicate that both the original footprint and floorspace have been increased. The footprint of the original building was roughly 44sqm, with extensions to this resulting in an overall footprint of about 136sqm – representing an increase of around 230% over the original building. The Council indicates that the original floorspace was approximately 88sqm over two floors, with this having increased to the current figure of roughly 198sqm; representing an increase of 120% over the original floorspace.
8. Within the Grounds of Appeal, the Appellant does not dispute the figures set out on page 3 of the officers' report. What is more, they agree that the existing house already constitutes a significant enlargement from the original dwelling, which is already, in Green Belt terms, a disproportionate increase over the original building. The Appellant considers that these historic increases in building size should not detract from the fact that the proposal seeks an increase in footprint of around 6 sqm and an increase in floorspace of roughly 12 sqm, which they consider to be 'very modest additions'.
9. However, whilst this is modest within itself, it does not account for the historic increases in the building size from its original size. Both local and national policy are clear in that it is the size over the 'original size of the building'. The proposal in this case would represent a substantial and disproportionate addition over and above the original dwelling, as demonstrated by the figures agreed between the main parties.
10. The Framework makes clear at Paragraph 79, that the essential characteristics of the Green Belts are their openness and permanence, so any reduction in these characteristics would also be harmful. In terms of openness of the Green Belt, it is clear that the proposal seeks a small increase in the size of the

existing building in terms of footprint and floorspace. It is also important to recognise that the increase in size of the building would not only be in terms of these two measurements, but also in terms of the overall bulk and height of the building thorough the increase in roof heights.

11. When all of these various factors are compared against the original building, it is clear that the extensions and alterations proposed would further erode the openness of the Green Belt. The proposal would therefore have an adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
12. In light of the fact it does not fall into one of the exceptions listed in Paragraph 89 or 90 of the Framework or any provided within the adopted Development Plan for the Borough, the development proposed would be inappropriate development, as defined by both. As such, the proposed development would be contrary to Policies GBSP1, GBSP2 and RA3 of the HDP and those of the Framework, which, amongst other aims cited previously, seek to maintain the national and local planning purposes of the Green Belt.

Character and appearance

13. The appeal site lies on the south side of Woodfield Lane and a short distance to the east of the junction with Kentish Lane. The site is occupied by a two storey, three bedroom detached house. The pitched roof comprises side facing gambrel gables. The property lies within a small cluster of development set around the junction of Woodfield Lane and Kentish Lane that includes a number of dwellinghouses and the Church of the Twelve Apostles.
14. It is clear that the house has been extended over the years. In particular the Appellant considers that many of these alterations are in an unsympathetic manner. For example, there is a large flat roof first floor front extension and a flat roofed garage, both of which are considered by the Appellant to be unattractive features. As a result the building could be considered to be a mix of architectural styles with a rather 'jumbled' appearance.
15. The proposed extensions and alterations include: A two storey front extension with a footprint of 6 sqm, infilling the recess between the existing two storey front extension and the garage. The creation of a gambrel-style gable to the front elevation above part of the existing flat-roofed, two storey front extension and the proposed two storey infill extension. The provision of a shallow pitched roof over the existing flat-roofed garage.
16. In themselves, these additions and alterations would provide a more cohesive appearance to the building. I note the Council's concerns over the size of the extensions in relation to design matters. However, these do not appear to be significantly different from the style of the main building, nor would they dominate the building when viewed as a whole given the relative dimensions. Moreover, the wider street scene comprises a mixture of building styles and forms, which lends itself to individual buildings having extensions which reflect their individual characters.
17. I therefore conclude that the design of the proposed additions would not be out of keeping with the host building, nor with the wider street scene. Accordingly, the proposal would accord with Policies D1 and D2 of the HDP as supported by the *Welwyn Supplementary Design Guidance 2005*, which, amongst other aims, seek to ensure the design of new developments are of a high quality.

Other considerations

18. Whilst the Appellant considers that the proposal is not inappropriate development within the Green Belt, I have found otherwise. In this respect the Appellant considers that the following very special circumstances which should allow it to be permitted.
19. In terms of the space to be created, this would form a study and en-suite. The existing ground floor layout is not considered to be adaptable to provide such a facility. What is more, the existing three bedroom house has just one bathroom. An en-suite bathroom to a main bedroom is considered to be a reasonable requirement in a modern dwellinghouse and without the proposed extension the existing first floor layout cannot be adapted to provide such a facility. I afford these factors modest weight in favour of the proposal.
20. I also agree with the Appellant that the proposed design would help improve the aesthetics of the building; finding no harm to character or appearance. Good design is a key component of good planning. I therefore afford this factor modest weight.

Overall Conclusion

21. Paragraph 88 of the Framework requires decision-makers to ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. In this case the proposal is inappropriate development and would reduce openness of the Green Belt.
22. Other considerations weighing in favour of the development must clearly outweigh this harm. Principal among these is that design is broadly acceptable and it would create an additional internal space in the form of an en-suite and study. Whilst I acknowledge these, and all other considerations put forward by the appellant, Paragraph 88 makes clear that all development in the Green Belt is subject to stringent national planning policy tests, which I have applied.
23. In light of this, I conclude that those considerations put forward which weigh in favour of the proposal fail to clearly outweigh the substantial harm by reason of inappropriateness and the other harm I have identified. The very special circumstances needed to justify the proposal do not therefore arise, and the proposal conflicts with Policies GBSP1, GBSP2 and RA3, and the Policies of the Framework, the aims of which I have aforesaid. The proposal would therefore conflict with the adopted development plan, and there are no material considerations which outweigh this conflict or indicate a decision otherwise.
24. Accordingly, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Cullum J A Parker

INSPECTOR