



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 July 2018

by **J D Westbrook BSc(hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th August 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/D/18/3202429

Wildewood, Kentish Lane, Brookman's Park, Hertfordshire, AL9 6JG

- 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 and Mrs M Guvener against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2017/2957/HOUSE, dated 4 October 2017, was refused by notice dated 15 February 2018.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of an existing external pool and outbuilding structures, the removal of external paving and terraced areas, and the excavation and construction of a basement with a ground-floor extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this case are:
 - Whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and any relevant development plan policies.
 - The effect on the openness of the Green Belt, and
 - Would the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, be clearly outweighed by other considerations? If so, would this amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal?

Reasons

3. Wildewood is a large detached house with extensive gardens in open countryside to the east of Hatfield. It is a 2-/3-storey house with flanking single-storey side extensions. There are a number of outbuildings and structures on the site including a large two-storey building containing two double garages and living accommodation, a large playhouse, and an open-air swimming pool with terraces and a changing room. The current proposal would involve the demolition of the swimming pool with its associated structures, and its replacement with a new basement level swimming pool, a reception/library building above and a connecting building containing a plant room and staircase, which would link the new buildings with the existing house.

4. Paragraph 143 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 145 notes that the extension or alteration of a building need not be inappropriate provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. In this case the original building should be taken to be the building as constructed subsequent to planning permission granted in 1998, which involved the demolition of existing buildings on the site and their replacement with a new dwelling.
5. Since planning permission was granted for the original building, there have been a variety of extensions and alterations to the property. Although there are slight discrepancies in the floorspace figures provided by the appellant and the Council for the original house compared with the current house, including whether certain basement and second floor figures are included as original, nevertheless there is general agreement that the increase in floorspace since the original house was built, that would result from the addition of the current proposal, would be in the region of 65%. I consider this to represent a disproportionate addition, particularly since it would appear that the cumulative increase in footprint could be around 100%, and there would clearly also be a significant increase in overall volume and bulk. The proposal would, therefore, be inappropriate development that is harmful to the Green Belt
6. Paragraph 144 of the NPPF states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. '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. In this case, the pool area is separated from the house by a patio and steps. Once demolished, the replacement basement pool area and living accommodation at ground floor level above would be linked to the existing house, increasing its apparent bulk and representing a very wide extension to one side of the house, which would unbalance what is currently a largely symmetrical building. By virtue of its scale, it would be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt and by virtue of its position, design and width it would be harmful to the character and appearance of the existing dwelling.
8. The appellant contends that, by virtue of the landform and landscaping around the site, the proposed extension would not be visible from outside of the site, whilst the basement extension would not impact on the openness of the Green Belt. However, the openness of the Green Belt is not just a matter of visibility and the proposal would represent a significant increase in the footprint of the dwelling and the overall bulk of the building.
9. The appellant also contends that the existing pool and surrounds already has an impact on the openness of the Green Belt. However, it would appear that the proposed new pool, with large ground floor extension above, would occupy a significant part of the existing pool area, and would add a much larger built dimension to that area, including a new light well with access steps.

10. Finally, the appellant indicates that the size of the plot would mean that the proposed development would not appear cramped, and that it would be of a high quality design to complement that of the existing dwelling. I accept that the plot is large, but that is no reason to add to the amount that is already occupied by built structures in this Green Belt area. Furthermore, the very wide side extension would not fit well with scale and character of the existing house and would undermine its symmetrical appearance.
11. For the above reasons, I conclude that the scale of proposed extensions, especially when taken with other extensions and alterations to the original dwelling, would represent disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. It would, therefore be inappropriate development, harmful to the Green Belt. There are no considerations that clearly outweigh this harm and there are, therefore, no very special circumstances to justify this inappropriate development.

J D Westbrook

INSPECTOR