

Town & Country Planning Act 1990

Planning Statement

Woodlands, School Road, Little Heath, Potters Bar, Hertfordshire EN6 1JW

Application for the demolition of single storey extension and erection of single storey pitched roof extension to accommodate part office use.

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Description of Site

The site is located within the settlement of Little Heath as outlined in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan.

The site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The property is located at the end of School Road and is accessed from an unmade driveway off School Road which is flanked either side by a beech hedge.

The site is comprised of a dwelling house with mixed office and residential use which lies within a large curtilage.

The current building comprises of a two-storey section which has a pitch tiled roof with gable ends and is finished in red facing brickwork. The original dwelling is painted with white render at first floor level.

The two-storey part of the property has attached to it a single storey area of accommodation, the subject of this planning application. This section of the property is where the office use is currently located. The existing single storey protrusion is made up of a partly pitched roof but mainly flat roofed.

This part of the house, as can be seen from the attached photographs, is poorly designed and not in keeping with the rest of the house.

The site is remote and well screened from nearby houses. It does not form part of any street scene and has no impact on the surrounding dwellings or landscape.

Description of Proposal

The Application seeks Planning Permission for the demolition of existing single storey extension and erection of a single storey extension with pitched roof.

Previous Applications have been submitted for the property most recently under Planning Reference 6/2021/1438/HOUSE. That Application was refused by reason that its scale would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt and a loss of openness. The Applicant and his Consultants have taken on board those concerns and reasons for refusal and have worked on a revised scheme in this application which we consider to be policy compliant both in relation to the Welwyn/Hatfield District Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Planning Assessment

The main issues to be assessed are as follows:-

1. Green Belt Policy
2. Design
3. Amenity issues

Green Belt Policy

The NPPF sets out at paragraph 143 that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent Urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

The main consideration in this proposal is whether it represents an appropriate form of development having regard to this general presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and if not, if there are any very special circumstances that justify it.

At paragraph 145 of the NPPF the National Policy states that a Local Planning Authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are: -

(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;

(d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces.

Paragraph 143(c) of the NPPF requires a calculation of the size of the extensions to be made with regards to the original dwelling, it is therefore necessary to establish the size of the original dwelling. Size relates to the floor area and to the height and overall mass of the resultant dwelling.

We have attached to this application calculations of area and volume. This sets out the footprint (m²), the floor area ((gea)(m²)) and the volume (m³). Those calculations are shown for the original house, the existing house as built, the scheme refused under planning reference 6/2021/1438/HOUSE and the amended proposed scheme, the subject of this planning application.

The floor area of the original house is 151.4 m² The existing as built has a total floor area of 299.6 m². The refused scheme (6/2021/1438/HOUSE) brought the total floor area to 309 m². Having taken the reasons for refusal into consideration, the total floor area of the scheme that forms the subject of this planning Application has been reduced and is 296.8 m².

The floor area of the total property including the proposed scheme will result in a decrease in the floor area to a figure of 296.8 m² when compared to the existing house at 299.6 m². There is also a decrease in the overall footprint from 181.6 m² (of the existing house that is built) to 178.8 m² should the proposed scheme be allowed.

The volume calculations are also provided in the table attached as can be seen, a reduction in volume has been achieved since the previous refused application against this proposal. When compared against the existing house as built, the proposed scheme results in a de minimus increase in volume (m³).

The original house was of course granted permissions which took the floor area to 299.6 m². This proposal in fact decreases the floor area to 296.8 m². Equally, there is a footprint reduction of 181.6 m² to 178.8 m². Whilst the total volume is increased it is our submission that this is de minimus.

It is therefore our case that the proposed extension does not result in an extension or alteration to a building that is a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building.

Furthermore, as exception (d) at paragraph 145 of the NPPF sets out the replacement of a building is not considered inappropriate provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one that replaces it. As set out in fact, the footprint and floor area is reduced. In terms of the volume, the increase would not constitute one that is materially larger than the one it replaces.

In addition, the Green Belt policy serves to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. It is our submission that the five purposes of protecting Green Belt land as set out in paragraph 134 of the NPPF are not affected by the proposed development.

With regards to assessing overall height and mass. The proposed extension would not increase the height of the original dwelling. The East side of the dwelling would remain in its existing form. The replacement extension in terms of footprint and floor area would not increase the overall mass, height and bulk of the dwelling. In fact, as described above, there would be a reduction in both of these calculations. Whilst there is an increase in the volume, this is not significant and would not impact on the overall height, mass and bulk of the building.

Effectively, the proposed scheme seeks to replace the existing single storey extension on a like for like basis in terms of footprint and floor area with, in fact, a reduction in these. The increase in volume is in relation to the pitched roof, however, it is not a case that that increase is significant and indeed, as the figures show de minimus.

In terms of the visual impact on the character of the surrounding Green Belt and Countryside. The proposed scheme in terms of size and scale would not reduce the openness of the rural landscape as the proposed extension is, firstly, a replacement of the existing built form, but for the introduction of a small increase of volume. Secondly, there are no views into the site and so the result and harm to the visual aspect of the Green Belt is non-existent.

Local Plan considerations

Policy GBSP1 sets out the definition of the Green Belt.

The Green Belt will be maintained in Welwyn Hatfield as defined in the proposal map. It is maintained that given the reasons above in relation to the calculations and the minimal views across the site, that the proposal in this scheme does not impede with the aim of GBSP1 in that it does not impact on the Green Belt being maintained. To further support that point it is our view that the 5 purposes of the green belt as per paragraph 134 of the NPPF are not contravened.

Little Heath is a specified settlement and again, it is not the case that the proposed development impedes the aim of the policy which requires development to be limited to that which is compatible with the maintenance and enhancement of the character and the maintenance of their Green Belt boundaries.

The proposed development has no impact on the character of the Green Belt nor does it impede on maintaining the Green Belt boundaries.

Special Circumstances Under Green Belt Policy

Without prejudice to our case that the proposed development qualifies as an exception under paragraph 145 of the NPPF, in the event that this is not accepted, then it is our case that very special circumstances are in place which outweigh the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm resulting from the proposal.

Those very special circumstances are as follows: -

1. The current extension is poorly constructed and of bad quality. There is a lack of insulation in the floor, external walls and roof resulting in high energy use and carbon emissions. The walls can not

be insulated which creates damp and cold. Some of the floors are at external level and thus liable to flooding in heavy downpours (there is not enough headroom to raise the floor to resolve this). The roof across the extension is of very poor construction, which leads to heat escaping. The floor is made of concrete and can not be insulated. The part pitched roof is not insulated. In parts of the extension there are ill fitted windows which cause draught and damp. There are various drainage and gulley issues across the extension which exacerbates the problem of cold and damp. It is alarming that due to the above factors the whole area needs 24-hour heating from early autumn to late spring. One of the main threads that runs through the NPPF is the environmental objective that seeks to mitigate climate change and move towards a low carbon economy. The current design and construction of the extension results in a high energy use and carbon emissions. The application made would rectify that in the most sensible way, bringing the construction of the extension to modern standards which can then be properly insulated and constructed to maximize the energy efficiency of the extension and reduce its carbon emissions for current and future generations.

2. The current extension is not in keeping with the rest of the house and is visibly at odds with it. The extension appears as a series of add ons and is not aesthetically pleasing. This application creates an opportunity to deal with the design and appearance aspects of the property, to create an extension which is more in keeping with the rest of the house. It is an opportunity to address the previous shortcomings in design so that it can be improved for current and future generations.
3. The proposal is on the whole a like for like replacement in terms of size with the current extension, therefore it does not appear out of keeping with the rest of the house or the property. There are no views across the site therefore the proposal has no impact on the surrounding area or landscape. The fact that there is a small increase in volume does not impact this. The pitched roof will of course be modern design and can therefore allow for better insulation and dealing with damp.

Design

Policy D1 of the Local Plan sets out that:-

“the Council require the standard of design in all new development to be of a high quality. The design of new development should incorporate the design principles and policies in the plan and the guidance contained in the supplementary design guidance”.

The proposed scheme in terms of design is completely in-keeping with the existing dwelling. In fact, it is a significant improvement to the design of the current dwelling. The proposed development enhances the design and character of the property. The current single-storey part of the dwelling which is to be demolished is not in-keeping with the design of the rest of the house. In fact, it is completely at odds with it and not aesthetically pleasing. The current design is incongruent with the house, it appears as a series of bolt-on extensions which do not compliment the house in terms of design and functionality. The proposed scheme is an opportunity to improve the current poor quality of design which will undoubtedly improve the design of the dwelling whilst keeping mainly within the size of the extension which is currently in existence.

Policy D2 relates to character and context. This requires:-

“All new developments to respect and relate to the character and context of the area in which it is proposed. Development proposals should as a minimum maintain, and where possible, should enhance or improve the character of the existing area.”

Whilst it is accepted that views into and across the site are limited (as explained above), an opportunity to enhance and improve the character and design of the building, which in turn will improve the character of the existing area.

Policy RA3 relates to extensions to dwellings in the Green Belt. This sets out as follows:-

“Permission for extensions to existing dwellings within the Green Belt will be allowed only where all the following criteria are met:-

- 1. The proposal would not individually or when considered with existing or approved extensions to the original dwelling, result in a disproportionate increase of the dwelling;*
- 2. It would not have an adverse visual impact in terms of its prominence, size, bulk and design on the character, appearance and pattern of development of the surrounding countryside.*

As maintained previously, it is not accepted that the proposal would result in disproportionate increase in the size of the dwelling. Furthermore, Policy RA3 does not refer to the exception in the NPPF relating to paragraph 145(c).

In terms of policy RA3 it is maintained that the proposed development would not have an adverse visual impact on the character, appearance and pattern of development of the surrounding countryside. This is due to the fact that, firstly, views into and across the site are non-existent and therefore there is no impact on the surrounding countryside. Furthermore, given that the increase in footprint and floorspace is decreased and that there is a minimal increase in volume in comparison to what is already existing on this site, there is no adverse visual impact as the prominent size and bulk of the proposal do not impact on the visual aspect. In terms of design as stated above, the proposed scheme is an improvement.

Amenity

In relation to residential amenities, there are no near neighbours which would be impacted by the proposed development. The nearest neighbours are located at a substantial distance away from the site. There will be no loss of privacy, impact on sunlight/daylight, or any considerations that result in the proposed scheme being dominant or over-bearing.

In terms of parking, given that the proposed scheme is providing a similar level of accommodation to that which already exists, there will be no required increase in the level of parking. Even so, the site can provide for ample parking.

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