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Your reference
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T/APP/A1910/A/85/033954/P7

PLANNING DEPARTMENT
DACORUM DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ref.	Date	Ack.	
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Received	17 OCT 1985		
Comments			

Sir

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1971, SECTION 36 AND SCHEDULE 9
APPEAL BY MR A CHIPPER
APPLICATION NO:- 4/0194/85

1. As you know I have been appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment to determine the above mentioned appeal against the decision of the Dacorum District Council to refuse planning permission for the erection of extensions and the carrying out of alterations to Hilltop, Northchurch Common, near Berkshamstead. I have considered the written representations made by you, by the council and by an interested person. I inspected the site on 1 October 1985.

2. Hilltop is a bungalow which has already been extended on both sides. The present proposal involves the construction of a first floor over the extension on the north-east side of the property and the replacement of the existing flat roofs on these extensions by pitched roofs. There is no dispute that the site is within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and within the Metropolitan Green Belt. It is therefore subject to a policy in the approved Structure Plan that permission will not be granted except in very special circumstances for the extension of existing buildings for purposes other than agriculture, small-scale sport and recreation or other uses appropriate in a rural area.

3. Although Circular 14/85 emphasises that there is always a presumption in favour of allowing applications for development unless that development would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance, it also reaffirms the Government's commitment to the protection of the Green Belt. I therefore consider that the main issue in this appeal is whether there are any special circumstances which are sufficient to justify the proposed development in the light of the policies for the protection of the Metropolitan Green Belt.

4. While I recognise that the proposed extensions and alterations would not increase the ground coverage of Hilltop they would result in a substantial increase in its floor area. Even though it would still have only 3 bedrooms, the bungalow would have a total floor area of some 203 sq m compared with its existing area of 133 sq m and its original 68 sq m. As a result, I consider that the character and appearance of Hilltop would be totally changed by the proposed development.

5. On my site inspection I noted that many of the other bungalows which form part of this group on the edge of Northchurch Common have been substantially extended and altered. I accept however that most of these developments pre-date the introduction by the council of its guidelines to extensions in rural areas. While these guidelines are non-statutory, they have been formally adopted by the

council as a response to increasing pressure to allow large extensions to houses in rural areas. In my view, these guidelines provide reasonable opportunities for the extension of existing houses; they also indicate that the council does not apply the Structure Plan policies rigidly. I therefore consider that the fact that the present proposal exceeds these guidelines must be a material consideration in my decision.

6. While I accept that the proposed development, in itself, would have relatively little impact on the appearance of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty since Hilltop is set well back from the road and that the replacement of the existing flat roofs by pitched roofs could improve the appearance of the property, I consider that if this appeal were allowed it would be likely to encourage other similar proposals and to make these more difficult to resist. The long-term result would be to increase the impact of this isolated group of dwellings on the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and to threaten its character. It would also lead to an increase in development in clear conflict with policies for the protection of the Green Belt.

7. Although you have argued that the proposed extension would enable the appellant to house his ageing parents, no evidence has been produced to demonstrate any particular needs in this respect. In any event, such personal circumstances would, in my view, need to be extremely strong to set aside the well-established national and local policies. I therefore consider that in this case there are no circumstances which are sufficient to justify the proposed development in the Green Belt.

8. I have taken into account all of the matters raised in the representations including the difficulties in maintaining the existing flat roofs. None of these is sufficient however to outweigh my conclusions on the main issue.

9. For the above reasons, and in exercise of the powers transferred to me, I hereby dismiss this appeal.

I am Sir
Your obedient Servant

M J BRUNDELL BA DipTP FRTPI
Inspector