



Strategic Place Planning

Report of Handling

Site Address:	Hillview, Skene Road, Aberdeen, AB15 8SL
Application Description:	Erection of single storey link extension and 1.5 storey extension with integrated garage to front
Application Ref:	230723/DPP
Application Type:	Detailed Planning Permission
Application Date:	13 June 2023
Applicant:	Mr Kenneth Sutherland
Ward:	Lower Deeside
Community Council:	Cults, Bieldside and Milltimber
Case Officer:	Esmond Sage

DECISION

Refuse.

APPLICATION BACKGROUND

Site Description

The site, measuring approximately 0.17 hectares, lies south-west of the intersection of the A944 and A90 public roads within the green belt on ground that rises to the south. It is accessed at its north-east corner from a private track road off the A944, and is surrounded on all sides by neighbouring fields. The track serves another dwellinghouse approximately 90 metres to the south; and there is a farm approximately 150 metres to the west. A gas pipeline runs approximately 50 metres to the west.

At the north end of the site is a traditional croft cottage dating back to the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, originally part of Backhill Croft. The cottage has been extended in subsequent years on all four elevations, consisting of two flat-roof extensions on the north and east; hipped roof and flat-roof sun porch extensions on the south; and a lean-to shelter on the west. The extension to the north accommodates 2 bedrooms for the house. The house is rendered in white wet dash with slate roof, dark brown uPVC and black timber windows and black metal guttering. There is a detached monopitch garage in white wet dash to the house's west.

Relevant Planning History

None.

APPLICATION DESCRIPTION

Description of Proposal

It is proposed to demolish the garage and the dwellinghouse's extensions. A single-storey extension measuring approximately 8.7 x 13.6 x 4.6 metres to ridge height would be erected on the south elevation, not including a flat-roof linking entranceway extension between the house and main proposed extension measuring approximately 4.7 x 3.7 x 3.0 metres. The cottage would be reconfigured to provide lounge and kitchen space and the proposed extension would accommodate two bedrooms, ensuite, bathroom, utility room and garage with space for two cars. The main extension would take the form of two gables, one for the garage and one for the habitable space. The extension would be clad in natural-finished timber with grey metal standing seam roofing to the main extension and single-ply membrane to the link entranceway. Windows would be grey alu-clad timber and guttering grey metal. Solar panels would be installed on the cottage and extension and rooflights and windows installed to the cottage's northern elevation.

Amendments

In agreement with the applicant, the following amendments were made to the application:

- Redesign of extension to reduce its height and alter its elevation form.

Supporting Documents

All drawings and supporting documents listed below can be viewed on the Council's website at:

<https://publicaccess.aberdeencity.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=RW6RT0BZKFU00>

- Design Statement
- Drainage Statement
- Bat Report

CONSULTATIONS

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) – do not advise on safety grounds against the granting of planning permission.

Shell UK Ltd. – has advised that the development would not affect the pipeline or its servitude strip.

Cults, Bielside and Milltimber Community Council – no comment received.

REPRESENTATIONS

None.

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Legislative Requirements

Sections 25 and 37(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 require that where making any determination under the planning acts, regard is to be had to the provisions of the Development Plan; and, that any determination shall be made in accordance with the plan, so far as material to the application, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Development Plan

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

- Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises)
- Policy 2 (Climate Mitigation and Adaptation)
- Policy 3 (Biodiversity)
- Policy 8 (Green Belts)
- Policy 14 (Design, Quality and Place)
- Policy 16 (Quality Homes)
- Policy 23 (Health and Safety)

Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2023 (ALDP)

- Policy NE1 (Green Belt)
- Policy NE3 (Our Natural Heritage)
- Policy D1 (Quality Placemaking)
- Policy D2 (Amenity)
- Policy D4 Landscape
- Policy T3 (Parking)
- Policy B6 (Pipelines, Major Hazards and Explosives Storage Sites)

Aberdeen Planning Guidance (APG)

- Householder Development Guide
- Transport and Accessibility

EVALUATION

Principle of Development

The site is in the green belt as designated by the Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2023 (ALDP) and therefore its principle is considered under ALDP Policy NE1 (Green Belt) and Policy 8 (Green Belts) of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). NPF4 Policy 8 permits ancillary extensions to existing buildings in the green belt, subject to policy outcomes that include the protection and enhancement of the character, landscape, natural setting and identity of settlements. Consideration of how the proposal does or does not achieve this outcome draws in other policies of the statutory development plan including Policy 14 (Design, Quality and Place) and Policy 16 (Quality Homes) of NPF4 and Policy D1 (Quality Placemaking) and Policy D4 (Landscape) of ALDP, which are considered in further detail in this evaluation.

ALDP Policy NE1 has a general presumption against development in the green belt except in limited circumstances which the policy sets out. Criterion (d) states that development will be permitted where it 'is associated with existing activities in the Green Belt and is within the boundary of that activity, is small-scale, does not significantly increase the intensity of the activity and the proposed built construction is subordinate to what already exists (including extensions to existing dwellings)'.

It is accepted that the development would not significantly intensify the activity at the dwellinghouse, as the number of bedrooms would remain the same and broadly a similar amount of accommodation would be provided on site as at present. On the question of scale and subordination to the existing dwellinghouse, the Householder Development Guide APG provides additional guidance in considering the design and scale of house extensions. General principles relevant to this question are that extensions should not overwhelm or dominate the dwelling and should be visually

subservient in terms of height, mass and scale. The built footprint of the dwellinghouse should not exceed twice that of the original dwelling, and no more than 50% of the front or rear curtilage should be covered by development.

Development of front and rear curtilage

The Design Statement submitted in support of the application asserts that the rear curtilage is 418 square metres and that the extension would occupy 118 square metres of this, leaving 300 square metres of rear undeveloped amenity ground. No drawings have been provided clarifying how the figure of 418 square metres has been derived, and upon undertaking calculations the extension's footprint would in fact would be approximately 128 square metres.

The house and site layout does not lend itself to a straightforward definition of front and rear curtilage. It is likely the property's original front doorway would have been in the middle of the south elevation; it is now on the east elevation through the sun porch. However, the extent of garden ground to the south and the northern approach are indicative that the primary area of garden ground lies to the south.

The rear curtilage so defined would be approximately 561 square metres. The extension's footprint would be approximately 128 square metres and hardstanding approximately 127 square metres, resulting in total development of 255 square metres, or 45% of the rear curtilage. While this does come under the 50% set as an upper limit by the guidance, the proposal's layout, in particular the placement of the garage to the far south of the curtilage, results in a greater extent of development than is necessary for the accommodation sought, contrary to the underlying principles that curtilage development should be minimised wherever possible, especially in the green belt. The garage is placed approximately 2.5 metres from the site boundary and approximately 0.5 metres from the embankment up to the site boundary, giving the impression of development almost right across the rear curtilage. Likewise, the garage's location would necessitate the extension of the driveway to the rear of the site and further unnecessary development of the curtilage. As the remaining undeveloped curtilage would be located towards the west out of public view, the result would be the appearance, in a rural setting, of a residential curtilage largely developed almost up to its boundaries. This would be detrimental to the green belt's rural character and setting, presenting the visual impression of an over-developed housing plot atypical of the nature of rural residential development in the area, characterised by houses set within largely open curtilages which do not abruptly address the surrounding fields.

ALDP Policy D4 (Landscape) requires development not to adversely affect those existing elements of landscape character which contribute towards a distinct sense of place. The main external viewpoints of the site are from the east, where the property is set against a backdrop of the valley along which runs the A944 public road, between two hills and with a view through to Westhill and the larger hills of Aberdeenshire beyond. The cottage and the relatively open boundary treatment it presents currently makes a distinctive and positive contribution to this landscape, balanced among several features that draw the eye including the scattered farms, hills and the conurbation further in the distance. The proposed extension, by developing almost up to the curtilage boundary and having a dominant effect on the original dwellinghouse, would detract from this contribution by drawing undue attention to the property and upsetting this balance. The proposal would therefore harm the existing elements of the landscape which contribute towards its distinct sense of place, and is contrary to ALDP Policy D4.

Built footprint and the original dwelling

There is no definition in the ALDP for 'original dwelling', although it is noted that the Scottish Government definition for this term in the householder permitted development rights, where it is often used when setting out criteria for extensions, is 'the dwellinghouse as built or as it was on 1

July 1948 if it was built before then.’ There is no precise information on the date of the extensions, however historic mapping and their design would indicate the likelihood that the north, east, and south extensions post-date 1948, with at least some in place by the mid-1960s.

The footprints of the existing and proposed built elements are summarised below. All dimensions are approximate and in square metres:

Existing		Proposed	
Original cottage as built	60	Original cottage as built	60
Extensions	73	Extension	128
<i>Total footprint of house</i>	<i>133</i>		<i>188</i>

These figures do not include the original garage to be demolished, as this is detached from the dwellinghouse and does not have the same impact in terms of scale and relationship.

The development which would result from the proposal would therefore be the original cottage restored to its footprint of 60 square metres by demolishing the existing extensions, with a consolidated extension that had a footprint of 128 square metres.

Given the considerations above, it is acknowledged that there is ambiguity in determining whether the proposal would more than double the footprint of the original dwellinghouse. While the proposal would result in the removal of several unsympathetic extensions which have been successively added to the cottage over the 20th century to facilitate its ongoing use, these are relatively small scale. Due to these, there would be sufficient grounds to accept in principle that it may be possible to extend the cottage substantially. However, the restoration and clarification of the original cottage’s form and the intention behind the APG reintroduce a requirement to extend the property in a way that is sensitive to the cottage’s original scale before any extension took place. Such matters will be discussed below.

Visual subservience

The proposed extension would be kept at a height just below the existing ridge height of the cottage and set back just behind the eastern building line. Along the main eastern elevation, the development would run behind the cottage to a width of approximately 17.4 metres, in comparison to the cottage’s gable width of approximately 5.3 metres. This would be more than three times the gable width of the cottage and would present the extension as the dwellinghouse’s dominant mass rather than the dwellinghouse. The Design Statement submitted in support of the application asserts that this view would ‘always be [at] an acutely skewed angle’ and therefore the impact of its mass diminished; however this is not the case, as the site is visible not only from the north-east but also the east from the road serving the house which runs parallel to the A90. From this vantage point, the eastern elevation can be fully and directly viewed, and the proposed extension would present an impression of dominating the existing dwellinghouse at a length more than three times the original, having an adverse impact on the dwellinghouse’s character by diverting attention from the cottage as the focal point of the site as has historically been the case in this landscape.

It is acknowledged from the Design Statement that layout alternatives were considered at the concept stage which would place the extension parallel to the cottage with a single gable end facing east. This would have diminished the visible difference in extent between the two masses and potentially resulted in a more acceptable dialogical relationship between the extension and the cottage in this respect. It had been excluded by the applicant on the grounds of dominant height and a dominant intrusion past the eastern building line; however the height is not determined by this layout and the problem of the eastern building line assumes the necessity of adjoining the garage

to the dwellinghouse. Retaining a detached garage as is on site at present could remove the need to build past this building line and would substantially reduce the proposed extension's scale, opening up the options for extending the cottage in such a way that did not overly dominate it.

The stated justifications in the Design Statement for integrating the garage are to store heating and renewable energy equipment and to 'future proof' the property with potential to adapt it into a habitable space. The first justification has not been sufficiently evidenced despite requests and the second is not considered compelling given the character of the proposal. In order to ensure development in the green belt was as modestly scaled as possible, the appropriate point at which to consider such a substantial extension of the property's habitable space would be via a separate planning application at such time that adaptation were required, not before the fact.

Given the considerations above under APG in relation to the requirement of ALDP Policy NE1 that house extensions in the Green Belt be small scale, it is considered that the proposal would not be small scale with respect to the original dwellinghouse, contrary to the requirements of ALDP Policy NE1. The result would be an extension which dominates the existing dwellinghouse and in so doing, given the house's setting, have a dominant and harmful effect on the character of the surrounding landscape, potentially setting a precedent for similar such developments in the green belt. This would run contrary to the policy outcome for NPF4 Policy 8 that the character, landscape, natural setting and identity of settlements is protected and enhanced via all development in the green belt.

Amenity and Design

ALDP Policy D2 (Amenity) requires developments to secure sufficient amenity for their occupants and neighbours, in particular by making the most of any opportunities offered by the site to optimise views and sunlight through appropriate siting, layout and orientation, and to not negatively impact existing amenity. The property is sufficiently distanced from any neighbouring property that it would not negatively impact neighbouring amenity.

It is acknowledged from the Design Statement that the proposed layout has taken consideration of the site's context, constraints and opportunities for amenity. There is agreement that the best outlook from the site would be towards the west and that appropriate siting of the extension's habitable spaces would maximise this opportunity. However, the proposal attempts to do this much at the expense of the site's southern curtilage, which also contributes significantly to the property's amenity being the largest extent of garden ground, oriented towards the sun's path to the south. The garage's siting as an integrated garage at the southern end of the extension would prevent much of the enjoyment of any sunlight towards the south, to the detriment of the property's amenity. The application therefore would not accord with ALDP Policy D2 (Amenity).

ALDP Policy D1 (Quality Placemaking) also bears upon considerations of design, scale and amenity, as it requires developments to demonstrate the six qualities of successful places, to be distinctive, welcoming, safe and pleasant, easy to move around, adaptable and resource efficient. NPF4 Policy 14 (Designing Quality Places) sets out similar criteria which do not conflict with Policy D1. The proposal would generally meet the latter three criteria. In terms of design, its use of materials would generally meet these requirements, as the timber cladding and metal standing seam roof would be sympathetic in relation to the design and materials of the traditional cottage.

The proposed extension's architectural form consists of two gable forms joined together and connected with the original cottage via a lower flat-roof link. Extending a small traditional cottage in this way, through a new form which is set apart from it and connected through a subservient link, has been done successfully and can be accepted in principle; one of the main advantages being that the cottage's original form can be most fully expressed while still extending the property. The form of the two adjoining gables recalls agricultural building forms which would be appropriate for the cottage's rural setting, and is suggestive of the typical arrangement of traditional farmhouse set

alongside farm sheds. However, the success of this strategy for extension is dependent upon a sympathetic relationship between the original dwellinghouse and its extension. As discussed above, the extension's scale and massing would have a dominating effect on the existing original cottage. The width of each extension gable would be greater than that of the original cottage, resulting in a formal rhythm that was disruptive to the appearance of the development as a whole.

It is considered that the scale and form of the proposal would be unsympathetic to the existing dwellinghouse, resulting in a development which did not meet the criteria for distinctiveness or welcome, diminishing the characteristic sense of place that currently exists. Likewise, given the considerations regarding amenity, the application would have a negative impact on the site's pleasantness, contrary to ALDP Policy D1 and NPF4 Policy 14. It is further contrary to NPF4 Policy 16 (Quality Homes), which requires householder developments to not have a detrimental impact on the character of the home and surrounding area in terms of size and design.

Climate and Nature Crises

The property has been considered a potential habitat for bats. ALDP Policy NE3 (Our Natural Heritage) requires development to not have a detrimental impact on important habitats or protected species. NPF4 Policy 3 (Biodiversity) further requires development to minimise any potential adverse impacts on biodiversity. The submitted Bat Report satisfactorily demonstrates that there are no signs of bats at the property and that no mitigation would be required with respect to bats.

As a householder extension, the application would not have a significant impact with regards to the climate crisis. It therefore meets the requirements of NPF4 Policy 2 (Climate Mitigation and Adaptation). Given the considerations regarding biodiversity above, it accords with NPF4 Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises).

Parking

ALDP Policy T3 Parking is supported by Aberdeen Planning Guidance: Transport and Accessibility in ensuring that development has sufficient parking to meet a development's requirements. The property is within the Outer City Area where 2 allocated spaces are set as maximums for dwellings of up to 3 bedrooms and 3 allocated spaces for dwellings of 4 or more bedrooms. The proposal does not alter the property's existing count of 2 bedrooms and provides 2 parking spaces via the double garage. It therefore accords with ALDP Policy T3.

Pipeline

ALDP Policy B6 (Pipelines, Major Hazards and Explosives Storage Sites) places a requirement on the Council to consult the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for all applications that fall within the consultation zone of a pipeline or other major hazards site, and to take full account of any advice received. Pipeline operators additionally will be consulted. NPF4 Policy 23 (Health and Safety) likewise requires development proposals to take full account of any associated risks from being close to pipelines and holds a strong presumption against decision making that overrides advice from HSE. HSE and the nearby pipeline operator Shell UK have both advised of no objection to the application. The application therefore accords with ALDP Policy B6 and NPF4 Policy 23.

DECISION

Refuse.

REASON FOR DECISION

The proposed extension would not be small-scale or subordinate to the existing dwellinghouse, its footprint and orientation being such that it would dominate the house in scale and massing, contrary to the stated exceptions for development to be permitted in the green belt under Policy NE1 (Green Belt) of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2023 (ALDP) and the policy outcome of Policy 8 (Green Belts) of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) that the character, landscape, natural setting and identity of settlements is protected and enhanced. It would further be contrary to the requirements for householder development in Policy 16 (Quality Homes) of NPF4 and would diminish the amenity of the dwellinghouse by building over a substantial part of the dwellinghouse's rear curtilage, contrary to the requirement to be welcoming and safe and pleasant under Policy D1 (Quality Placemaking) and Policy D2 (Amenity) of the ALDP and Policy 14 (Design, Quality and Place) of NPF4.