

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 September 2016

by George Arrowsmith BA, MCD, MRTPI

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

Decision date: 20 September 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/N1920/D/16/3153608

5 Meadow Way, Potters Bar, EN6 2NJ

- 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 E Perrin against the decision of Hertsmere Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 16/0639/HSE, dated 4 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 31 May 2016.
 - The development proposed is a two storey side extension and part front extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the parent building and on the street scene.

Reasons

3. The appeal property is a semi-detached house at one end of a row of similar properties on the north east side of a suburban street. The properties on the opposite side of the street are semi-detached dormer bungalows. The appeal proposal includes an approximately 4.m wide two-storey side extension. The extension would be more than half the width of the existing house; it would not be set down at ridge height or set back from the parent house's main front wall. The proposal also includes a front porch extension which the Council find acceptable. I therefore limit my consideration to the two storey side extension.
 4. I read in the officer's report that a previous application was submitted under ref 15/2089/HSE for the same proposal as that in the current application. The report says that the application was amended during the application process as the two storey element did not result in a subservient addition. The report describes the proposed extension before amendment as being "*more than half the width of the main house, the first floor was not set back and the ridge was not set down*". Although this description is not explicitly cited as an objection to the current proposal it is clear that it represents both the officer's and the Council's assessment of the proposal before me.
 5. The Council's Planning and Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) says (in Part E) that it is very important that two storey side extensions
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accurately reflect the design of the main house and remain secondary in their size and appearance. The height and width should be proportionate to the dimensions of the main house, the width should be significantly less than the width of the main house and the extension should be set back by at least 1m from the main front wall of the house to allow the original proportions of the building to remain the prominent feature.

6. The SPD itself does not explain why a 1m set back is required to allow the original proportions of a building to remain the prominent feature or why this is a necessarily desirable objective. Similarly the SPD does not say why the width of an extension should be less than the width of the main building. In addition, the officer's comments about the extension being more than half the width of the main house and the ridge not being set down do not reflect specific guidance in the SPD.
7. With regard to the SPD, I am satisfied that in most cases its guidance is sound. For example, in many cases a two storey side extension can threaten the symmetry of a building and make it appear unbalanced. Any such effect can be minimised by limiting the width of the extension and setting it back so that it is less prominent. There may however be occasions where an extension brings symmetry to an unbalanced building. It is therefore always necessary to take account of the specific context in applying the SPD's guidance.
8. The officer's report introduces other criteria, specifically those requiring a set down in ridge height and limiting an extension's width to no more than half that of the original building. These do not appear to originate in the SPD. In many cases the application of these additional criteria will avoid visual harm but, again, their application should recognise the specific context.
9. In the present case it is relevant that two nearby houses, No 1 and No 27 Meadow Way already have similar side extensions, neither of which has a lower roof line or is set back from the parent house. There are however only two such extensions in a line of 14 houses, with the result that they do not determine the street's overall character. Furthermore, both extensions are at the end of the line of houses. No1 is a considerable distance from the appeal site and, although closer, No 27 is one of a pair set at 45 degrees to the other houses in Meadow Way so that it does not appear as an integral part of the street scene. From their appearance, both extensions were constructed before the SPD was adopted in 2013. The policy considerations affecting the proposal before me might therefore be significantly different from those in place when these existing extensions were constructed.
10. I consider that the proposed extension would, if considered entirely in its local context, have a limited harmful visual effect. By failing to be set back from the main front wall of the house the extension would undermine the prominence of the existing front wall, thereby accentuating the unbalancing effect it would have on the appearance of the pair of semi-detached houses to which it belongs. The requirement that extensions should be set back by at least 1m from the main front wall of the house is now contained within an SPD with the additional consequence that allowing the appeal would make it more difficult for the Council to uphold the guidance in other locations. The result could then be that the limited harm from this single development would be compounded. Taking this precedent effect into account, I am satisfied that the effect of the

proposal on the appearance of the parent house and the wider street scene would be unacceptable and would conflict with the objectives of policy SADM31 in the Site Allocation and Development Management Policies Plan 2013, policy CS22 in the Council's 2013 Core Strategy and policy D21 in the 2013 Hertsmere Local Plan.

11. I have considered the other two ways in which the proposal fails to meet the design criteria identified in the officer's report - exceeding half the width of the parent house and failing to incorporate a step down in ridge height. I give relatively little weight to the first of these because it lacks specific support from the SPD, and appears somewhat arbitrary. Although I see no SPD requirement to step down ridge height it self-evidently makes an extension more likely to appear subservient and less likely to appear intrusively out of balance. This aspect of the proposal therefore strengthens my finding that the proposal is unacceptable although it does not carry the same weight as the setback criterion which is explicitly identified in the relevant SPD.
12. I am sympathetic to the appellant's wish for more living space but this does not override the wider public interest in maintaining acceptable standards of development. In the present case I am aware that planning permission has already been granted for a smaller extension.

George Arrowsmith

INSPECTOR