
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 October 2016

by Brendan Lyons BArch MA MRTPI IHBC

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

Decision date: 03 November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/D/16/3152903

33 Harebell Drive, Thatcham, West Berkshire RG18 4DX

- 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 & Mrs S and C Woodrow against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref 16/00381/HOUSE, dated 4 February 2016, was refused by notice dated 18 April 2016.
 - The development proposed is a ground floor front extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matter

2. The description of development in the heading above is taken from the planning application form. The appeal form refers also to a dormer extension to the roof but, as is clear from the description, this did not form part of the application. The dormer window is shown on the plans but is noted to be carried out as 'permitted development'. The Council officer's report confirms that the property does not benefit from permitted development rights and that the Council did not consider the dormer as part of its assessment of the application. This element cannot now be added in at appeal stage. Even if I wished to reach a view on the dormer, I would have no information on the Council's response to it, and whether or not planning permission would have been granted. The assessment of the appeal is therefore confined to the proposed front extension.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed extension on the character and appearance of the house and of the surrounding area.

Reasons

4. The appeal property is a two-storey detached house situated on a large modern suburban estate. There is a variety of types of houses on the estate, but those in the vicinity of the appeal site are predominantly detached houses laid out in closely spaced, loosely aligned rows set back from the road front behind open gardens and drives.

5. Even among these detached houses there is a variety of detailed designs, but there is an overall consistency of form and materials that gives character and visual coherence to the group. All of the houses have gabled roofs with their main ridge parallel to the road, but often relieved by forward-facing gable features. At ground level, many garages project forward from the house, and attached canopy roofs carry across porches and bay windows. The faceted bays, either single-storey or carried up to first floor level, form an attractive consistent design feature.
6. The appeal property is typical of the above description. Its garage projects well forward, but unusually with a hipped rather than a gabled roof, and there is a small gable feature in the centre of the main roof. The house, like some of its neighbours, has decorative flint-work panels at first floor level.
7. Permission is sought to add a single-storey extension across the full width of the house, to create an enlarged living room and lobby. The extension would project forward beyond the garage to an overall depth of some 3.26m. The roof would be hipped at each side, with a shallow-pitched front slope containing a small gable feature.
8. The house to the left, No.31, is sited quite close to the road much further forward than No.33, and presenting a blank gable to it. Because of this setback, there could be more scope for a forward extension to No.33 than in most other locations nearby. However, the depth of the extension now proposed would be excessive, forming a dominant feature on the house front.
9. Its shallow roof pitch would be out of keeping with the main roof and with other surrounding roofs, which all have slopes within a consistent range. The ground floor gable feature would be out of alignment with the gable on the main roof, creating an uncomfortable visual relationship. The proposal would replace the existing bay window with a flat front wall, thereby depriving the house of one of its main features, consistent with the other houses. The plans do not show the existing windows correctly, so that it is not clear if the proposed windows are to be replacements, or if only the ground floor window would be new. In either case, the pattern of the glazing would not match the distinctive windows of the neighbouring houses, as the existing windows do well.
10. For these reasons, I agree with the Council that the proposal would appear contrived, out of keeping with the house and harmful to the street scene. The proposal would be contrary to the Policy CS14 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026), which seeks to promote good design, and to the National Planning Policy Framework, which advises that permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of the area.
11. I have sympathy with the family's desire for extra space and to expand their home in a sympathetic fashion. However, neither those aspirations nor the lack of objection from neighbours or the parish council would outweigh the potential harm to the character of the house and of the estate from the design now proposed. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Brendan Lyons

INSPECTOR