
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 November 2016

by Paul Jackson B Arch (Hons) RIBA

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

Decision date: 09 December 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/D/16/3156720

Manor Farm, East Worldham, Alton, Hants GU34 3AY

- 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 A Tait against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref SDNP/16/02006/HOUS, dated 15 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is re-roofing of existing house to provide two additional bedrooms within roof space (to be no higher than existing).
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Preliminary matters

1. The development was described as above on the application form. The Council described it as 'Loft conversion to include alterations to roof with four dormer windows to front and three dormer windows, and balcony to rear'. This is a more accurate description.
2. The drawings of the existing building provided with the application omit a substantial chimney above the southern elevation. The appellant advised that this is to remain and I have considered the appeal on this basis.

Decision

3. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for a loft conversion to include alterations to roof with four dormer windows to front and three dormer windows and balcony to rear at Manor Farm, East Worldham, Alton, Hants GU34 3AY in accordance with the terms of the application, ref SDNP/16/02006/HOUS, dated 15 April 2016 and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: D0928/02B, D0928/04B
 - 3) No development shall take place until details of the design of the flat roof junction(s) with the pitched roof, the dormer windows, the balcony and eaves including plans/elevations/drawings at a scale of not less than 1:10 have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
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- 4) No development shall commence until details of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the roof extension hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are as follows:

- The effect of the proposed alterations on the character and appearance of the dwelling; and
- The implications for the range of dwelling sizes available in the area.

Reasons

Policy background

5. The development plan for the area includes the saved policies of the East Hampshire District Plan Second Review of March 2006 (LP). Policy H16 says that outside settlement policy boundaries, as in this case, permission will be granted for the replacement or extension of a dwelling provided that it does not exceed a certain floor area figure over its original floorspace as measured in 1974. The purpose of the policy is to maintain a mix of dwelling sizes in the countryside where the stock is fairly static. That stemmed from the now withdrawn advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 of 2000 which sought to ensure that new housing developments help to secure an appropriate mix of dwelling size, type and affordability in both new developments and conversions to meet the changing composition of households in their area in the light of the likely assessed need. This aim was continued in Planning Policy Statement 3 in June 2006, which sought a choice and a better mix in the size type and location of housing in order to contribute to the creation of mixed communities.
6. Since the adoption of H16, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has come into being and this is an important material consideration. However the NPPF states that the social dimension of sustainability includes a social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations. The core principles include the stipulation that every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area; and that the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the need to support thriving rural communities within it should be recognised. Paragraph 50 says that to deliver a wide choice of high quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities, planning authorities should plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community. Paragraph 55 indicates that in rural areas, exercising the duty to cooperate with neighbouring authorities, local planning authorities should be responsive to local circumstances and plan housing development to reflect local needs. I draw from this that policies that ensure that a mix of dwelling sizes remains available in the countryside must be relevant to these objectives. I conclude that policy H16 is not inconsistent with the NPPF in principle and weight attaches to it to the extent that it has a valid planning aim, but the criteria within the policy must attract a degree of caution.

7. Policy HE2 indicates that alterations and extensions will only be permitted if they are designed to take account of the design, scale and character of the original building, its plot size and setting. The roof form of any extension should respect the form of the original building.
8. The Joint Core Strategy (JCS) was adopted by the South Downs National Park Authority on 26 June 2014. Policy CP29 concerns design and advises amongst other things that new development is required to seek exemplary standards of design and architecture with a high quality external appearance that reflect the area's particular appearance.
9. There is an emerging development plan in the form of the South Downs National Park Preferred Options Local Plan, but no significant weight attaches to its policies at the current time.

Character and appearance

10. Manor Farm is a substantial 2 storey farmhouse set in a prominent location with far reaching views towards the south east and the South Downs. The existing roof is hipped in construction displaying on the west elevation 4 separate hipped ends with associated valley gutters. The proposed alterations incorporate new bedroom accommodation within the roof space by simplifying this elevation to resemble that on the east side and providing new dormers.
11. The existing roof construction has a certain amount of visual interest seen from the west because of the 4 hipped ends, but has lost its original symmetrical appearance, having been extended to the side some time ago. Maintaining the existing roof pitch inevitably means that the new roof would incorporate a flat element, but with sensitive design of the roof upstand and ridges, that would be hard to perceive. This form of construction is not unusual on many large houses originating from the 18th and 19th centuries where roofs contain ancillary accommodation, and if properly detailed, does not represent poor design; nor would it necessarily detract from the character of the existing building. In this connection, the reasons put forward by the Council to explain why the proposal is thought to detract are unclear. Moreover, there is the opportunity to provide an equivalent amount of visual interest in the new dormer windows, balcony, eaves and gutter line. In this connection, I note that the application drawings indicate a level of joinery detailing and moulding that would enhance the building. The new dormers would be sensitively positioned related to the roof slope and existing fenestration. The overall height of the roof would not change. I conclude on this issue that providing that a condition is attached requiring the details of the roof construction to be approved by the Council, the scheme would not conflict with the design quality aims of LP policy HE2 and JCS policy CP29.

Dwelling size

12. There is some dispute about the area of the existing dwelling and the additional area proposed. The Council advises that the area of the dwelling in 1974 was just under 342 square metres (sqm). The building was extended in 2010 with a rear conservatory providing a total (according to the Council) of 399.15 sqm, just under the 400 sqm maximum allowed under policy H16 for dwellings of between 267 and 400 sqm. The existing roof is only accessible via a loft ladder and cannot be considered as habitable accommodation. I therefore discount the appellant's argument that the existing dwelling including the loft is already

approaching the 401 sqm threshold and that the extension would be immaterial.

13. Whichever calculation is adopted, the total floorspace of the extended house would be well above 401 sqm. This would, on the facts, conflict with the aims of policy H16, but in my view there are significant mitigating circumstances. Firstly, the existing house is already a substantial property with 5 bedrooms; the proposal would not increase this number, but provide additional space and an increase in the quality of the accommodation. Secondly, the rationale behind the thresholds set out in policy H16 is not explained; it is unclear why retaining a smaller 5 bedroom house as the Council suggests will help in maintaining a mix of dwelling sizes, or help to satisfy the identified housing need, which according to the East Hampshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Local Housing Requirements Study of August 2013, is for houses with 1-3 bedrooms. The Study also categorises the current housing stock; the appeal property already falls within the highest tier, having 7 or more rooms. It follows that the proposed improvements are very unlikely to conflict with the aim of planning housing development to reflect local need. These material considerations persuade me that the fundamental objectives of LP policy H16 would not be undermined by the proposed rooms in the roof.
14. The proposal would not conflict with the design quality aims of policy HE2 of the LP or policy CP29 of the CS. Improvements to energy efficiency required by policy H16 will follow from compliance with the current building regulations. The appeal should succeed.

Conditions

15. I have imposed conditions to ensure that the materials used are sympathetic to the existing building and requiring the dormers, eaves, balcony and roof to be constructed in accordance with detailed drawings to be approved. For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning, the approved application drawings are listed.
16. For all the above reasons, the appeal should be allowed.

Paul Jackson

INSPECTOR