

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 January 2017

by Clive Tokley MRTPI

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

Decision date: 9 January 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/D/16/3161233
14 Townsend Lane, Harpenden, AL5 2QE.

- 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 J Scholey against the decision of St Albans City Council.
 - The application Ref 5/16/2023, dated 29 June 2016 was refused by notice dated 26 August 2016.
 - The development proposed is described as part single part two-storey rear extension and first-floor side extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for a part single part two-storey rear extension and first-floor side extension at 14 Townsend Lane, Harpenden, AL5 2QE. The permission is in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 5/16/2023 dated 29 June 2016 subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 10286-01, 10286-02, 10286-BP, 10286-LP and 10286-RP.
 - 3) The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host dwelling and whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Harpenden Conservation Area (the CA).

Reasons

3. The extensive and varied CA includes the centre of Harpenden, open green areas to the south and residential areas adjacent to them. The appeal property lies within a residential area to the north west of the town centre. My impression was that this part of the CA was originally developed at the turn of the 20th century with large Victorian and Edwardian houses being interspersed
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with smaller dwellings. I noted a number of more recently-built dwellings and apartments including some close to the appeal property.

4. Townsend Lane in the vicinity of the appeal property does not host the grander houses that are found in Salisbury Avenue, however the mature front gardens and street trees create a pleasant avenue. Rear garden vegetation, including the high hedges of the appeal property severely limited my appreciation of the area at the rear of the houses. Nevertheless; whilst the generous rear gardens are part of the CA I consider that the significance of this part of the CA derives principally from the character and appearance of the streets and those parts of the buildings that are visible from the streets.
5. The first floor side extension would add a fourth full-height bay to the eastern end of the house. The design of the roof and front-facing half-dormer would match those of the western-most bay. This would balance the appearance of the front of the house creating a more symmetrical building than the existing cottage-like dwelling. I have no reason to disagree with the Council's view that the front elevation would not be out of keeping with the existing pattern of development in Townsend Lane. The proposal would increase the bulk of the building when seen from the road but I consider that the increased size and more formal appearance would not be out of character with this part of the CA and would not detract from its significance as a heritage asset.
6. The two-storey and single-storey additions at the back of the house would not encroach significantly into the large rear garden and they would be roughly in line with the rear of the dwellings on each side. The proposal would add to the bulk of the dwelling at the rear; however the overall height of the dwelling would not be increased and the twin hipped roofs would reflect the roof form of the existing dwelling. The different heights and designs of the rear projections would result in a somewhat disjointed appearance and in my view the proposed large central window placed beneath the valley is a particularly unfortunate detail. The shallow mono-pitch roof and fenestration of the single storey extension share nothing with design of the dwelling.
7. In my view there is some justification for the Council's criticisms of these aspects of the design; but being at the rear of the house with very limited public exposure I consider that they would not be unacceptably harmful to the character or appearance of the host dwelling.
8. In the absence of assessments by either of the main parties I have concluded that the significance of this part of the CA derives from the character and appearance at the front of the houses. I consider that the rear extensions would fail to achieve the architectural quality that would be required at the front of the house; however they would have no material effect on the significance of the heritage asset and would at least preserve the character and appearance of the CA.
9. For these reasons the proposal would not conflict with local and national policies that seek to safeguard heritage assets.

Conditions

10. To ensure a satisfactory appearance I have imposed a condition requiring that the external materials of the proposal should match the existing house. This is in addition to the normal conditions controlling the commencement of the development and identifying the approved drawings.
11. The officer report refers to the loss of a large mature conifer but at my site visit I was not able to identify any trees of townscape or heritage value that would be lost by the proposal and therefore I can find no justification for a condition requiring a replacement tree.

Conclusion

12. Taking account of all matters I have concluded the proposal would not unacceptably detract from the host dwelling and that it would least preserve the character and appearance of the Harpenden Conservation Area. I conclude that the proposal would not harm the significance of the heritage asset and that the appeal should succeed.

Clive Tokley

INSPECTOR