The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 April 2017

by Chris Couper BA (Hons) DiP TP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 10th May 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/G3110/D/17/3170415
56 Godstow Road, Wolvercote, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX2 8NZ

- 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 Sara Alleyn against the decision of Oxford City Council.
- The application ref: 16/03064/FUL, dated 21 November 2016, was refused by notice dated 23 January 2017.
- The development proposed is a single storey rear extension and internal alterations to form accommodation for an elderly relative.

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for a single storey rear extension and internal alterations to form accommodation for an elderly relative at 56 Godstow Road, Wolvercote, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX2 8NZ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 16/03064/FUL, dated 21 November 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 drawing numbers: 198816:1, 198816:2, 198816:3 and 198816:4.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on:

   i) the character and appearance of the host property and the area, including whether or not it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wolvercote with Godstow Conservation Area; and

   ii) the living conditions at no. 54 Godstow Road, with particular regard to the outlook from that property, and the availability of light to it.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The site sits within the Wolvercote with Godstow Conservation Area ('CA'). Within conservation areas there is a statutory duty to ensure that their character or appearance is preserved or enhanced. The Wolvercote with Godstow Conservation Area Appraisal 2007 describes the CA's green attributes and its rural character. It depicts Lower Wolvercote, where the appeal site is located, as spread out along Godstow Road, with mainly two storey terraces and semi-detached properties set back from the road behind small front gardens and low boundary walls, thus giving continuity to the street frontage.

4. No. 56 is located near the junction with Elmthorpe Road, towards the end of a short, terraced row of dwellings, which sit on long, narrow plots. The dwellings' front faces have a regular rhythm and relatively uniform appearance, and look out over Godstow Road to the open meadows of Wolvercote Common. However, to the rear many of the dwellings have been significantly extended or otherwise altered, and therefore display considerably less cohesion than to the front. Many have sheds or large outbuildings within their rear gardens.

5. No. 56 has been significantly extended, and its long single storey rear projection spans the plot's width. That extension projects much further than the rear face of one of its neighbours at no. 54, but not as far as the rear face of the other neighbour at no. 58.

6. I appreciate the Council's concerns regarding the cumulative impact of extensions. However, looking across the rear gardens in this terrace, particularly from Elmthorpe Road, the over-riding impression is not of open space and greenery, but of low level built development in the form of extensions and outbuildings, with a backdrop of trees beyond. Although the Council states that the resultant dwelling's plan form would be deeper than the depth of the remaining garden, I noted on my visit that no. 56 would retain a fairly long and largely undeveloped garden area. In that context, I am not persuaded that extending the built form at no. 56 to just beyond the depth of no. 58's extension would appear out of place, or that it would erode this area's character.

7. Furthermore, although the extension's roof would have a shallower pitch than the building it would attach to, the scheme's set down, low height, and timber-framed translucent roof would give it a lightweight and subservient appearance. The facing brickwork would match that in the host dwelling, and the scheme would respect this terrace's prevailing characteristics, which includes extensions in a variety of styles, cascading down from the main building.

8. For those reasons, I am satisfied that the character and appearance of the host property and the area would be preserved, that the statutory duty would be met, and that the scheme would not conflict with policy HE.7 of the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 ('LP'). Whilst the Council's Officer report additionally refers to LP policies CP.1 and CP.8, together with Oxford Core Strategy 2026 (2011) policy CS18, and policy HP9 of the Oxford Sites and Housing Plan 2011-2026 ('SHP'), their design and contextual requirements do not alter my conclusions on this matter.

Living conditions

9. The rear elevation of no. 54 contains a partly glazed door and narrow window serving what appears to be a porch/utility area. That door leads to a narrow outdoor space adjacent to the property's short lean-to and attached shed, and from there to the remainder of the rear garden. There is a low boundary fence to no. 56.

10. As a result of this proposal, looking out from no. 54's rear door and adjacent outdoor area, the length of built development to the left boundary would be extended. However, the proposal would be sited well beyond the porch's glazing, which in any event does not appear to serve a main habitable room. Sections of no. 54's long rear garden are well beyond the site of the proposed extension.

11. Consequently, and as the proposed extension would be lower than no. 56's existing extension, would have a partly translucent side wall and roof, and would be set in slightly from the boundary, I am satisfied that the scheme would not have a significant impact on no. 54's outlook, or adversely impact the occupants' living conditions as a result of a significant loss of light.

12. The scheme would therefore not conflict with the requirements of LP policy CP.10 that development should safeguard the amenity of other properties and be orientated to provide satisfactory light and outlook. Although the Council contends that the scheme would not meet the 45 and 25 degree guidelines set out in Appendix 7 of the SHP, it seems to me that, even if those guidelines are applied to no. 54's porch, any failure to comply would be largely due to the existing extension, and that this proposal would not materially affect the availability of light to that area. There would not therefore be a conflict with the broad thrust of SHP policy HP14.

Conditions and conclusion

13. Summing up, the scheme would not harm the character and appearance of the host property or the area, and would not materially impact the living conditions at no. 54 Godstow Road. The appeal will therefore be allowed.

14. I have considered the Council's suggested conditions against the tests in the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition to the standard time limit condition, in the interests of certainty, I agree that a condition requiring that the development be carried out in accordance with the approved plans, is necessary. For the above reasons, and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is allowed.

Chris Couper

INSPECTOR