
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 April 2017

by J F Powis BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 1st June 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/K0425/D/17/3167500

68 Haw Lane, Bledlow Ridge, Buckinghamshire HP14 4JH

- 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 Duggan against the decision of Wycombe District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/07236/FUL, dated 15 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 27 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a new single storey detached garage building to replace existing single storey detached garage building.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background and Main Issues

2. The appeal site lies within the Green Belt. Paragraph 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt, subject to certain exceptions. One such exception is limited infilling in villages. The appeal site lies within the settlement limits of the village of Bledlow Ridge and is surrounded on all sides by existing residential development.
 3. Having considered all of the evidence before me, I have taken the view that the proposal would constitute limited infilling in the village and would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt for the purposes of paragraphs 87, 89 and 90 of the Framework. As such, there would be no conflict with saved Policies GB2 and GB4 of the Wycombe District Local Plan to 2011 (adopted January 2004) (LP) or Policy CS9 of the Wycombe Development Framework – Core Strategy (adopted July 2008) (CS), which together seek to protect the Green Belt.
 4. On this basis, the main issues in this case are the effect of the proposed development on:
 - the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area, with particular reference to The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and,
 - the living conditions of the occupants of no.70 Haw Lane, with particular regard to outlook and the availability of natural light.
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Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. The appeal site is a parcel of residential land to the east of Haw Lane within the village of Bledlow Ridge. A detached house and separate garage currently occupy the site. Haw Lane is a residential area characterised by detached houses set in large plots. Houses are generally set back from the road by driveways and generous areas of front garden with mature trees and planting, which contributes to a spacious and sylvan feel in the area. The site falls within The Chilterns AONB.
6. The existing double garage is a detached brick structure sited centrally in the width of the plot and close to the front elevation of the host dwelling. Its position and siting on higher ground than the house partially obstructs views of the host property from the street. Nonetheless, its materials and overall aesthetic echo that seen in the house itself.
7. The proposed development would involve the demolition of the existing garage and the construction of a triple garage with loft space above. The new garage building would be set considerably closer to the northern boundary of the appeal site, with its front elevation facing south. Whilst its depth may be comparable to that of the existing garage and compliant with the Council's parking standards, the building would also be significantly wider than the existing garage and set perceptibly closer to the front boundary of the site. In common with the existing garage, it would have a pitched roof, although the angle of the pitch would be greater in the proposed garage, resulting in a greater overall ridge height.
8. I accept that repositioning the garage away from the centre of the site may allow an improved layout within the plot in terms of internal movement between the parking area and front door of the house. Due to the topography of Haw Lane, which slopes downhill from south to north, the repositioned garage would sit lower than the level of the existing garage which also has the potential to improve its visual relationship with the house. Notwithstanding this, due to the particular design, scale and siting of the proposal before me, which would be of a significant size relative to the house and with a substantial roof form, the building would in my view overpower the front of the site.
9. I understand that there is an extant planning permission to extend and alter the house which appeared not to have been implemented at the time of my visit. It has been put to me that the appeal proposal should be viewed in the context of the consented extension works to the house, which would, amongst other things, bring the two storey form of the house substantially further north than the existing dwelling. The existing garage would therefore sit in a central position relative to the front elevation of the extended house. However, even viewed in the context of the extended house, the garage as proposed would be of such a disproportionately large scale and prominent position as to dominate the overall appearance of the site.
10. As well as providing covered parking for three vehicles, an external staircase on the side elevation of the building would lead up to a loft room with three roof light windows. The appellants state that the space would be used for storage or as a future home office. In my view, the external staircase and front roof lights would give the building a domestic appearance that would

further undermine the primacy of the host dwelling within the site. I have had regard to the appellants' stated intention to utilise the garage as the sole outbuilding on the site with a view to reducing visual clutter. However, this in itself would not overcome the significant visual impact of the proposed building.

11. During my visit I saw that it is not uncommon for properties along the eastern side of Haw Lane to have detached garages positioned to the front of houses. I viewed a range of specific examples cited in support of the proposal but found the majority of existing garages to be considerably smaller than the proposal before me. Furthermore, most were far less prominent in views along Haw Lane due to having lower profile roofs, being set down lower than the level of the road, or being well screened by boundary trees and vegetation. By comparison, the appeal building with its steeply pitched roof, substantial footprint and close proximity to the front boundary would appear large and prominent in the street scene.
12. It has been argued that the siting of the appeal garage is comparable with the siting of the existing garage to the front of no.70 Haw Lane. Whilst acknowledging that the garage at no.70 sits close to that site's northern boundary, it is considerably more set back from the road and screened by dense planting. I also note that the garage at no.70 is of a less significant size, with a half-hipped roof form, and set at a lower height relative to the road than the appeal garage. I therefore do not agree that the example is directly analogous to the particular circumstances of the appeal proposal.
13. As a result, nothing I saw elsewhere in Haw Lane was sufficiently similar to the appeal development as to justify it. I am told that there are other examples of detached garages with roof accommodation elsewhere in the village but have not been given any specific evidence in this regard.
14. Therefore viewed in its wider setting, I consider that the scale and siting of the garage would be unsympathetic to the established pattern of the surrounding development and as such would be a discordant structure in views along Haw Lane. I note that the plans propose new planting toward the front of the site to supplement the existing modest front boundary hedge. However given the significant height and width of the building, I am not satisfied that this would be sufficient to screen views of the building from viewpoints along Haw Lane.
15. Views toward the proposed garage from the open countryside of the AONB would be very limited due to the position of the main house, which would provide a visual barrier to the east. However, since Bledlow Ridge itself is also part of the AONB, I am mindful of the need to respect its rural character and contribution to the area's special landscape qualities.
16. Due to the ridge top position of the village, there are good views from Haw Lane to the rolling landscape of the AONB to the east and north. This strong visual connection with the surrounding countryside helps to root the village in its rural setting. Travelling in a northerly direction along Haw Lane, the considerable width and height of the proposed garage would block some of the existing distant views to the surrounding countryside which would weaken the area's connection with its setting. Whilst these adverse effects would be limited by the relatively minor nature of the proposal, they nonetheless carry weight in my overall consideration since AONBs have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.

17. Having regard to all of the above matters, I conclude that the proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area, with particular reference to The Chilterns AONB. Consequently, it would be contrary to saved Policies L1, G3, H17 and Appendix 4 of the LP and Policies CS17 and CS19 of the CS, which together seek to ensure that development within residential curtilages is of a high quality design that is sympathetic to the context of the host property and the character of its surroundings, including the scenic beauty of the AONB.

Living Conditions

18. No.70 Haw Lane is a detached chalet style dwelling located immediately to the north of the appeal site. The proposed garage would sit to the south-west of the neighbouring house. At its closest, the garage would be approximately 1 metre from the shared boundary and the dwelling at no.70 is sited in close proximity to that boundary. There would therefore be a close relationship between the two buildings.
19. Within the front elevation of no.70 at ground floor level there is the sole window to what I am told is a study, which constitutes a habitable room. Due to the slope of the land, the garage would sit considerably higher than the house at no.70 and would be set forward of it. Given this, together with the substantial dimensions of the garage in terms of height and width, the garage would appear as a large and oppressive presence when viewed from within the study and from the front external amenity space of the property. I do not accept that the angle of garage's siting in relation to that of the house at no.70 would materially reduce this effect on the outlook of the neighbouring residents.
20. The appellants state that landscaping to the rear of the garage would minimise these effects, although it is unclear whether this would rely on the existing hedgerow planting or assumes new landscaping. In any event, I do not consider that this would be sufficient to overcome the harmfully overbearing effects of the garage identified above.
21. The Council states that the proposal would fail comply with its design guidelines on light angles set out at Appendix 4 of the LP pursuant to Policy H17, although I note that they are in fact presented as guidelines for residential extensions. Regardless of the applicability of the guidelines, it is clear that the house at no.70 sits considerably lower than the proposed garage and that the aforementioned study window is the main source of light to the room. The substantial mass of the garage would lie in close proximity to the south-west of the window. As such, I consider that the building would have an adverse effect on the levels of natural light available to the study throughout the day which would materially erode the living conditions of its occupants.
22. The combination of these factors indicates that the proposed garage building would have an unsatisfactory relationship with the neighbouring property. I therefore conclude that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the living conditions of the occupants of no.70 Haw Lane, with particular regard to outlook and the availability of natural light. As a result, it would fail to comply with saved Policies H17, G3 and G8 of the LP and Policy CS19 of the CS, which together require that new development safeguards the amenity of occupants of surrounding land and buildings in terms of access to daylight, visual intrusion and overshadowing.

Other Matters

Benefits of the Proposal

23. I have had regard to submissions that the existing driveway is of a restricted length, meaning that visitors park on the grass verge of the public highway to the front of the site. The appellants contend that the proposed development would have the benefit of minimising on-street parking, thereby reducing risks to highway safety. I saw during my visit that the existing driveway has space for at least two vehicles in addition to the space available within the garage itself. I therefore consider it likely that the need for on-street parking related to the site arises only occasionally. I saw some limited evidence of vehicles parking on the grass verge in this section of Haw Lane, although due to the good forward visibility and relatively low speeds of traffic in the area, this did not appear to pose a significant risk to the safety of highway users. As a result, I attach limited weight to this benefit in my overall consideration of the proposal.
24. The appellants submit that the existing garage and its doors are not wide enough to accommodate either of their cars and I acknowledge that the proposed development would provide more modern and user friendly parking and access arrangements on the site. I also note submissions that the proposal would improve natural surveillance on the route to the front door, increasing perceptions of security. It could also result in minor improvements in the levels of natural light reaching the front elevation of the house, resulting in enhanced living conditions for its occupants.
25. These are matters that weigh in favour of the proposal. However I am mindful that they are largely private benefits that arise for the occupants of the site which must be weighed against the public harm of the scheme. On balance, I find that none of these matters, either taken alone or together, are sufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified in respect of the two main issues in this case.

Conclusions

26. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J F Powis

INSPECTOR