
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 May 2017

by Jonathan Manning BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 6 June 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/N0410/D/17/3171965

41 St. Huberts Close, Gerrards Cross, SL9 7EN

- 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 Ricky Bika against the decision of South Bucks District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/02354/FUL, dated 10 December 2016, was refused by notice dated 16 February 2017.
 - The development proposed is part two storey, part single storey front/side/rear extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue of the appeal is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located on St. Huberts Close and currently accommodates a large two-storey detached dwelling, which at the time of my site visit was undergoing refurbishment. I observed that the area is predominantly residential and has a very distinctive character and appearance. This results from the large detached dwellings that have attractive and largely unarticulated front elevations and attached double garages, which are set within a very spacious setting. In most cases, the large dwellings are set well back from the road behind large front gardens. The dwellings are also generously and consistently spaced, with a noticeable rhythm. The existing garages are generally positioned in line with or slightly recessed from their associated dwellings. The existing garage roofs are all of similar shallow pitch and many have window shutters on the front elevations. All of these features create a particularly prominent uniformity and harmony to the street scene along the road close to the appeal site.
 4. The area has a pleasant leafy context with well landscaped front gardens. There are also large trees to the rear of the appeal site and the surrounding houses that are readily seen from the road, between the dwellings and over their associated garages.
 5. The majority of Huberts Close is identified in the Souths Bucks Townscape Character Study Part 2 Revision A (July 2015) as an Area of Special Character.
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This document sets out at Page 62 that *'St Huberts Close has been identified as an Area of Special Character, due to the distinctiveness and homogeneous landscape and townscape character. It is an area that falls broadly within the 'Open Plan Suburban' character typology, but is distinct. The area is considered sensitive to new development as a result of its homogeneity and the development pressure that appears to already exist along its edges'*. I consider that Souths Bucks Townscape Character Study Part 2 Revision A is a material consideration of significant weight.

6. The proposal seeks to construct a part two storey and part single storey side extension, which would replace the existing garage and link. At ground floor level the extension would sit flush with the front and rear elevation of the host dwelling. At first floor level it would be set back from the front elevation by 0.5 metres and set in from the northern flank by 0.5 metres. The roof would be hipped to match the host dwelling and would be set down from the ridge height of the host dwelling by 0.5 metres. The scheme also consists of a replacement porch.
7. The appeal site has a planning history, which includes an appeal¹ for a relatively similar proposal. In that case, the Inspector stated when considering the first floor extension that *'The first floor extension would significantly increase the two storey width of the property. This would detract from the spacious setting of the building, would restrict views from the road of trees to the rear and would disrupt the rhythm and harmony of the street scene. Because of its substantial width and the minimal set-back of the front wall and set-down of its roof it would also be harmful to the well-balanced character and appearance of the existing property'* (Paragraph 7). There have been no significant material changes on the site or in terms of planning policies and guidance since the determination of the previous appeal. Consequently, I afford the previous Inspector's findings significant weight.
8. I accept that efforts have been made to overcome the previous Inspector's concerns. This includes providing a set in from the front elevation and the northern flank of 0.5 metres at first floor level and stepping down the ridge height of the proposed extension by 0.5 metres from the host dwelling. In addition, the previously proposed scheme included a rear gable ended two-storey extension and a forward projecting garage, which have been removed as part of this scheme. I consider that this has resulted in a scheme that would appear suitably subservient to the host dwelling and would not, in itself, be harmful to the character and appearance of the existing property.
9. However, despite such alterations the proposed extension at first floor level would significantly increase the width of the two storey part of the existing dwelling. In my view, when viewed from the road this would noticeably reduce the level of spaciousness at the appeal site from that which currently exists and this would be highly visible in the street scene. Despite the slight reduction in overall width and height the proposed extension would also still restrict the views of the trees behind, which I consider currently provides a pleasant and spacious context for the appeal site. For these reasons, I consider that the proposal would result in the noticeable loss of spaciousness and openness at the appeal site, which are fundamental contributors to the character and appearance of the area. Further, the presence of the proposed extension, by

¹ APP/N0410/D/16/3159757, dated 28 November 2016.

virtue of its siting, width and scale, would be an obtrusive and incongruous feature in the street scene, detracting from the distinctive and rhythmic character and appearance of the area, as identified above and in the Souths Bucks Townscape Character Study Part 2 Revision A (July 2015).

10. The proposal would comply with the minimum level of separation distance of 1 metre as set out in Policy H11 of the South Bucks District Local Plan (1999) (the LP) and there would be an overall separation distance of 4.5 metres to the dwelling on the neighbouring plot. However, 1 metre is a minimum distance and Policy H11 of the LP also requires extensions to not have any adverse impact on the character of the locality, which in this case, I have found that it would cause harm.
11. I accept that there are examples of similar developments within the Area of Special Character (Nos 28, 57A, 69 and 75) and examples of accommodation over garages (Nos 87 & 89). The appellant's statement also refers to other similar developments at Nos 7, 11, 16 and 18, although these fall outside of the Area of Special Character. Notwithstanding this, I observed these examples on my site visit and I consider that these in themselves do not reflect the predominant character and appearance of the area, as identified above and do not provide any justification for the proposed development that would be harmful in its own right. It also appears from the Council's application reference numbers that the existing examples within the Area of Special Character were all permitted some time ago and before the production of the Souths Bucks Townscape Character Study Part 2 Revision A (July 2015).
12. I acknowledge that the redevelopment of the site at No 45 for a larger dwelling than the one that previously existed has been granted permission by the Council (Ref 16/01500/FUL). However, the dwelling in that case would have a single storey link attached garage, in keeping with the character of the area. This example is therefore not directly comparable to this scheme.
13. Further, the previous Inspector when considering the subject of examples of similar development in the area stated '*...they are not characteristic of the area and do not materially mitigate or justify the harm that the appeal proposal would cause*' (Paragraph 9). Although I am not aware of which examples the Inspector had been referred to in that case, this largely reflects my own findings, which I consider adds weight to them.
14. The proposed extension would have matching materials to the host dwelling and would be acceptable in terms of its architectural style. It would also maintain the established building line of the area. However, the acceptability of the proposal in relation to these matters does not overcome or outweigh my other concerns.
15. For all of the above reasons, I consider that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and therefore runs contrary to Saved Policies H11 and EP3 of the LP. These seek to ensure: proposals to alter and extend existing residential dwellings do not have an adverse impact on the character or amenities of the locality; developments of poor design, which are out of scale or character with their surroundings, are not permitted and that the retention and provision of space between buildings should respect the scale of spaces in the locality. The scheme also conflicts with the Souths Bucks Townscape Character Study Part 2 Revision A (July 2015).

Other matters

16. The appellant has set out that this proposal is the only option to accommodate the growing needs of the family, as it is not possible to convert the loft to living accommodation. Whilst this is noted, I am not of the view that this is sufficient to outweigh the identified harm, particularly given the large nature of the existing dwelling.
17. Interested parties have raised several other concerns. However, I am dismissing the appeal on other grounds and therefore such matters do not affect my overall conclusion. Consequently, such other matters have not had a significant bearing on my decision.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons set out above and having regard to all other matters raised, the proposal conflicts with the development plan when taken as a whole and does not represent sustainable development, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. There are no material considerations that outweigh the identified harm and the associated development plan conflict. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Jonathan Manning

INSPECTOR