
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 June 2016

by H Porter BA(Hons) PGDip IHBC

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

Decision date: 27 June 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/C1625/W/17/3171473

Land Behind 4 Great Orchard, Thrupp, Stroud GL5 2DJ

- 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 Ricardo Rios against the decision of Stroud District Council.
 - The application Ref S.16/1863/FUL, dated 17 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is re-submission of previously approved scheme S.15/1485/FUL for the erection of a new dwelling. Addition of a master bedroom and alterations to fenestration and roof design.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is situated within a steep-sided valley landscape in the settlement of Thrupp, on the outskirts of Stroud. The fragmented pattern of generally modest and well-proportioned properties populating the steep hillside behind Great Orchard gives views out to the dramatic local topography. While the area is residential, the generous spacing of houses, hedges and mature trees combine to create the sense of a verdant and semi-rural environment.
 4. As the local landform rises, development tends to be cut into to the land and respond to the steep local topography. The garden plots next to the appeal site contain various ancillary structures, none more than single-storey, which also enable legibility of the hillside above. Extant dwellings on the same side of The Rope Walk as the appeal site respond similarly to the hillside, to the extent that there remains a clear sense of the steep valley landscape that characterises the wider area.
 5. The appeal site spans a portion of sloping land between Great Orchard at the lower end and The Rope Walk, where the Council have already granted planning permission for a flat-roofed, two-bedroomed dwelling. The design of the unimplemented permission clearly sought to respond sensitively to the local landform, with a single storey elevation fronting The Rope Walk and a staggered, two-storey rear elevation. The simplicity of the flat, largely green
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- roof would have assisted with the assimilation of this dwelling into the local landscape, ensuring that the character and appearance of the surrounding area would remain unaffected.
6. The appeal proposal seeks to modify the extant consent, effectively creating a master bedroom suite within an additional storey. While keeping the same footprint as the consented two-bedroom dwelling, the appeal scheme would increase the scale of the building considerably and add significantly to its overall bulk. The proposed mansard roof would be unrelated to the pitched and hipped roof forms that predominate in the vicinity of the appeal site. It would also lack the architectural subtlety and refinement that the flat roof of the consented dwelling had achieved, irrespective of whether or not flat roofs are normally endorsed in the Residential Design Guide. In this context, the mansard roof would appear as an out-of-proportion and overly dominant feature. This impact would be exacerbated by the dark standing-seam material proposed. The additional storey and overall increase in scale would exaggerate the visual prominence of the dwelling on what is currently an open and undeveloped portion of the hillside.
 7. It has been suggested that, since the Council determined the original application, the character and appearance of the area has materially changed. During my site visit I was able to see the 'summer house', which occupies the top of the rear garden associated with Number 2 Great Orchard, on the corner with The Rope Walk. Despite its prominent corner location, this structure is clearly ancillary to the main dwelling and, seen from The Rope Walk, is just single-storey. The appeal scheme relates to a dwelling occupying a significantly larger and more prominent portion of land. I therefore do not consider the site-specific circumstances provide a useful comparison to the appeal scheme.
 8. The large garden associated with Number 17 Great Orchard has outline consent for two dwellings. Under this application, all matters have been reserved for future consideration, including design and layout. However, it is clear that the Council have considered the outline scheme on the basis that the dwellings would be two storeys, whereas the appeal scheme would have the appearance of three storeys from on the rear, most prominent, elevation. Moreover, it was apparent from my site visit that the garden of Number 17 Great Orchard is on a gentler incline compared to the appeal site, and is well screened from The Rope Walk by dense boundary vegetation. Therefore, the appeal site, which is steeper and more prominent, would be more sensitive to development changes.
 9. From public vantage points, only glimpses of the extension granted at Rope Walk House are visible. In any event, this dwelling occupies a higher position on the hillside. Despite its three-storey form, therefore, it does not appear to dominate the landscape, or detract from the character and appearance of the area. All things considered, I do not consider that these recent developments have materially affected the character of the area to the extent that would justify the harm the appeal scheme would cause, nor do they indicate any inconsistency in the Council's decision making.
 10. Despite being partially sunk into the ground and set back to keep a stepped form, the scale and form of the proposed additional roof storey would cause it to appear dominant and prominent, particularly when viewed from Great

Orchard and the surrounding valley landscape. Rather than representing a successful residential use of the site, the effect of the appeal scheme would be to diminish unacceptably the character and appearance of the surrounding area, even though the site has been considered suitable for new development in locational terms.

11. The proposed development would thereby run contrary to Policy HC1 of the Stroud District Local Plan, adopted November 2015, namely criterion 1, which requires proposed housing to be compatible with the character and appearance of the area. Although not referred to in the Council's decision notice, I also find conflict with criterion 5 of Policy CP14, which requires a development to be of an appropriate design and appearance, respectful of the surroundings, including the local topography. A general compliance with the other criteria in this or other development plan policies does not outweigh the harm in terms of character and appearance. The proposal would therefore run contrary to the development plan taken as a whole as, well as to the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework, which seek to secure high quality design that takes account of the character of different areas. As such, the development would also fall short of contributing to the environmental role of sustainable development and would not represent sustainable development overall.
12. I have had regard to the presence of other properties within the vicinity, some of which appear to be three-storeys. However, considering the site-specific circumstances of the appeal proposal, these examples do not alter my decision. The lack of harm in relation to living conditions or demands on infrastructure and services are neutral factors in consideration of the merits of the appeal; as are the absence of objections from nearby residents and the Parish Council. The structural integrity of the retaining wall between the neighbouring property sits outside consideration of the planning merits of the proposal, and has therefore carried very little weight in reaching my decision.

Conclusion

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

H Porter

INSPECTOR