

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 July 2017

by John D Allan BA(Hons) BTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 13th July 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/D/17/3175120

Holly Lodge, Castle Hill, Farley Hill, RG7 1XA

- 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 Mrs Belinda Coulson against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 163570, dated 19 December 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 February 2017.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a two-storey extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development upon:-
 - The character and appearance of Holly Lodge and the wider area; and
 - Protected species.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. Holly Lodge is a detached two-storey dwelling within a countryside location characterised by sporadic dwellings within a fairly dense woodland setting. The plot is triangular shaped and surrounded on all sides by roads, namely Castle Hill, Castle Road and Priest Hill. Regardless of the orientation to its original frontage, the current entrance to Holly Lodge is taken from Castle Hill where there is driveway with an in-out arrangement leading to a detached, single-width garage that sits to the front of the dwelling and set at an angle in relation to it. The planning history shows that the property has been extended from a fairly modest lodge in a manner of ways over the years but sympathetically so in my opinion such that the existing dwelling appears well proportioned and comfortable in its setting.
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4. Policy CP11 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan Document (CS), adopted in January 2010, deals with proposals outside development limits, including within the countryside. In the case of residential extensions it seeks to ensure that proposals do not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building. I have not been directed anywhere to where the term 'inappropriate' within this context is defined, and despite the increase in size over the volume of the original property, which I accept in this case may exceed 100%, I share the Council's stated view that volumetric increases are not the sole determining factor in assessing the impact of any proposal upon the character of an area, including the intrinsic qualities of the countryside.
5. The Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) June 2012 deals with alterations and extensions to buildings at its section 4.11. It says that they should: - be well designed; respond positively to the original building; contribute positively to the local character; and relate well to neighbouring properties. It goes on to say that alterations or extensions should be clearly subservient to the form and scale of the original building in most situations but it recognises also that there may be exceptions where it is more appropriate to design a seamless continuation.
6. In this instance it is proposed to remove the garage and to extend the property towards Castle Hill with a two-storey wing projecting forward to one side of its front elevation. I accept that the extension would be large and would not be seen as particularly subordinate in relation to the original dwelling. However, the appeal proposal would merely result in the existing building appearing to be remodelled in relation to its size, shape and layout. The materials proposed for the extension would match the existing, as would the form and pitch of the roof and other detailing, including the fenestration pattern. To my mind the extension would appear neither incongruous nor alien. When viewed from Castle Road the extension would be out of sight. Similarly, it would be largely unseen from Priest Hill due to the very dense and mature planting around this part of the site and which is typical for the area. In vantage points from this direction, where it would only be glimpsed, the addition would appear reasonably seamless with the original and the scale of the building from this side would merely resemble the scale of building that can be seen from Castle Road in terms of width, height and overall bulk.
7. The extension would be most noticeable from Castle Hill but it would project no further forward than the existing garage where its traditional form would again appear well related to that of the existing dwelling. Although there may well be a fairly substantial spread to the footprint of the original dwelling, there would be no significant encroachment of building across the site. The existing space around Holly Lodge, including the substantial amount of mature planting and landscaping, would be largely unaffected such that the dwelling would remain comfortable within its plot without visually impacting upon the quality and character of the surrounding countryside, which would be maintained. As such I find that the proposal would represent an acceptable form of development with regard to CS Policy CP1 and without conflicting with the aims or objectives of CS Policy CP11, or with those of CS Policy CP3, insofar as they all relate to the impact of development upon the quality of its surroundings.

Protected Species

8. The appellant has not disputed the Council's assertion that the site falls within an area which is suitable for bat foraging. Given the woodland nature of the surroundings I have no reason to disagree and in these circumstances there is a reasonable likelihood of protected species being present on or near to the site. Given also that the extension would involve work to the existing roof structure of the building there is a risk that protected species may be adversely affected by the proposal.
9. Paragraph 3.116 of the Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Document (LPD), adopted February 2014, states that where the nature and location of a development is such that nature conservation impacts may be significant, ecological surveys and report may be required; these to be prepared by a suitably qualified or experienced ecologist and to include, amongst other things, an assessment of existing biodiversity interests and how the development would be expected to impact on these, together with any measures necessary to mitigate harm.
10. In this instance no ecological information has been provided. I have carefully considered the appellant's suggestion that this matter could be controlled by condition but I am mindful that Circular 6/2005: *Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and Their Impact Within The Planning System* indicates that where there is a reasonable likelihood of a protected species being present and affected, a survey should be carried out before planning permission is granted. It goes on to advise that surveys should only be required by condition in exceptional circumstances. I have been presented with no evidence to suggest that there are exceptional circumstances in this case. I cannot be certain that a bat population would not be adversely affected by the works and therefore the proposal would be contrary to Policies CP3 and CP7 of the CS, and Policy TB23 of the LPD. Amongst other things these seek to ensure that new development can put in place mitigation measures to maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora, including protected species.

Conclusions

11. Notwithstanding my findings with regard to the effect of the proposal upon the character and appearance of the area, the absence of any ecological information leads me to conclude that the development would have the potential to harm biodiversity. As a consequence the proposal would fail to protect the natural environment, a role that is required by the National Planning Policy Framework in order to secure an appropriately sustainable form of development. The conflict that I have identified with both the development plan and national policy means that the appeal does not succeed.

John D Allan

INSPECTOR