



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 October 2017

by Clive Tokley MRTPI

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

Decision date: 11 October 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/K2230/D/17/3178914
306 Singewell Road, Gravesend, DA11 7RF.

- 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 Jas Mahal against the decision of Gravesend Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20170140, dated 10 February 2017, was refused by notice dated 28 April 2017.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as a two storey side and rear extension to existing house.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Clarification

2. The application form indicates that the proposal comprises extensions only to the side and rear of the dwelling. It makes no reference to the alterations and extensions at the front of the house, the raising of the height of the roof and the boundary walls and gates. It is nevertheless evident from the submitted drawings, the Council's decision and the grounds of appeal that all of these form part of the proposal.
3. In the interests of completeness and accuracy I have based my decision on the description of the development adopted by the Council and reproduced by the appellant on the appeal form as follows:- Two-storey side and rear extension incorporating the construction of new roof with increased height over existing dwelling, a two storey front porch with void over and two, two storey bay windows. Erection of front and side boundary wall and vehicular entrance gates.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:-
 - the effect of the alterations and extensions to the dwelling and the boundary treatment on the character and appearance of the area;
 - the effect of the extensions and alterations on the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring dwellings – principally in respect of over looking from the rear balcony and;
 - the effect of the proposed access arrangements on highway safety.

Reasons

Character and appearance - extensions

5. The appeal property is within an extensive residential area between the A2 and the centre of Gravesend to the north. Despite this the presence of the golf course to the west which is bounded by hedgerows, creates a semi-rural feel to the west side of Singlewell Road and the north side of Harman Avenue. No 306 lies directly opposite the junction between those roads and is the southernmost of a line of well-established detached dwellings on the east side of Singlewell Road. The dwellings are of varied design including chalet style bungalow with front dormers and houses with hipped and gabled roofs.
6. The appeal dwelling sits forward of the nearest house to the south, which is part of a more modern development served by Southfields Green. This includes smaller houses, terraced three-storey houses and apartments. Its entrance is marked by two detached houses clad mainly in black horizontal boarding with white render below. The finishing materials of these houses, which is repeated within the new development, the openness of the junction and the increased density of the modern development contrast with the more open character of the frontage facing the golf course which includes, and extends north from, the appeal property.
7. The appeal dwelling has a simple rectangular plan under a hipped roof. The rendered walls and plain clay tiles reflect the range of materials employed in the houses to the north. The front garden is unkempt and is bounded by a low wall constructed from irregular stones with an over-grown hedge above. The proposal would increase the height, width and depth of the dwelling and radically change its appearance. Therefore whilst correctly described as an extension it would be tantamount to a new dwelling.
8. The application form indicates that the walls would be finished in render and brick under a tiled roof. As the drawings indicate only two masonry finishes it is reasonable for me to conclude that the light areas on the drawing are proposed to be rendered and that the darker areas would be brickwork, but it is possible that they could include other unspecified cladding material. The grounds of appeal state that the rendering present on the existing house has been "extended throughout" but there is no information to clearly indicate what the finishing material would be.
9. Both the front and south side elevations of the house would be prominently in view from the street. The front elevation would be dominated by three flat-topped projecting bays. The appellant's appeal document indicates that the bays are "based on simple symmetry" but the composition of the front elevation would not be symmetrical. The prominence of the bays would be increased by their extension through the eaves line and the indication on the drawings that they would be finished in a dark material that would contrast with the main walls.
10. Symmetry is not a pre-requisite for good design but I consider that the almost symmetrical design of the front elevation would appear uncomfortable. I consider that the form and prominence of the bays and their projection through the eaves and roof plane would be alien to the hipped appearance of the roof. This would result in an unresolved appearance that would detract from the character and appearance of the dwelling and the area.

11. When approached from the south the side elevation would (currently) be partially screened by the laurel hedge in the garden of No 1 Southfields Green; however the contrasting projecting bays at both the front and rear extending through the roof line would be apparent. These projections would relate unsatisfactorily to the relatively simple hipped roof contributing further to the overall incongruous nature of the bays.
12. At my site visit I was able to see the more contemporary approach to design employed in recent nearby development using contrasting materials and box bay windows. The use of dark horizontal boarding extends into the road frontage with Singlewell Road but this forms part of a coherent development that is separate from the older frontage houses. Whilst there is scope for the remodelling of the appeal dwelling I consider that the additive approach adopted in the proposal would result in a design that would fail to respond to the underlying character of the hipped roof dwelling (which it is sought to retain). The dwelling is in a very prominent location and the proposal would unacceptably detract from the character and appearance of the area.

Character and appearance – walls and gates

13. The appeal property lies at the southern end of the row of older detached dwellings facing the golf course to the west. The front gardens to the north are mainly bounded by low red-brick walls at the back edge of the pavement with trimmed hedges and other shrubs and small trees extending above them. To the south the higher fences and walls at the entrance to Southfields Green are set back from the road. The proposed boundary wall would be higher than those to the north but lower than the more recent fence and walls to the south. The rendered finish with dark coping would contrast with the brick walls to the north; however in my view, at this point of transition, walls that reflect the character of the host dwelling may not be out of place.
14. Had I been minded to agree with the appellant as regards the design and appearance of the extensions I would have been more sympathetic to the design of the wall. However in the light of my conclusions on that aspect of the proposal I find that the walls would unacceptably detract from the character and appearance of the area. I have very limited information about the gates but I consider that in this prominent location with a semi-rural feel the tall gates and pillars would be inappropriate.

Character and appearance – conclusion

15. On this issue I conclude that both the extensions and alterations to the dwelling and the walls and gates would unacceptably detract from the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would conflict with Policy CS19 of the *Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014* (the CS) which indicates that new development must be visually attractive, locally distinctive and integrate well with the surrounding area.

Living conditions

16. The proposed full-width rear balcony would enable views down into the rear garden of No 300 Singlewell Road and the front garden of No 1 Southfields Green. It would also enable views towards the rear windows of No 300 and the front windows of No 1 from close range. It is possible that measures could be taken to prevent this unacceptable overlooking but they are not incorporated

into the proposal. In the light of my conclusions on the other main issues I do not need to consider them further.

17. The proposal would be likely to adversely affect daylight reaching the side windows of No 300; however from what I could see at my site visit the rearmost ground floor window serves a room that has a main rear-facing window and the high-level ground-floor obscure-glazed window is a secondary window to a room with a large front-facing window. The occupier of No 300 indicates that the high level first floor window serves a bedroom; however whilst the outlook from that window would change I consider that the proposal would not be sufficiently harmful to light or outlook to justify the refusal of permission.
18. Being due south of No 300 the proposal would cast a shadow over its rear garden and at some times of the day would interrupt direct sunlight to the rear-facing windows. However taking account of the offset between the proposal and those windows the proposal would not unacceptably affect natural lighting reaching the rooms served by them. The extension would be seen in oblique views from the nearest rear-facing windows of No 300 and would affect the outlook from the garden of that property. However No 300 has a fairly large garden allowing an open aspect to the rear. I therefore consider that the proposal would not be unacceptably overbearing.
19. On this issue I have concluded that the proposal would result in unacceptable overlooking that would conflict with CS Policy CS19 which indicates that new development should safeguard the amenity, including privacy, of the occupiers of neighbouring properties and land.

Highway safety

20. The Council's *Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 - Planning Policy for Vehicular Accesses to Classified Highways* (February 2009) (PGN6) indicates that Singlewell Road is a Class C road where a minimum depth of 5m should be available from the back edge of the pavement to ensure that cars can be parked wholly off the road. The proposed gates would be at an angle to the road with their mid point being about 3m from the back edge of the pavement (measured at 90 degrees from the pavement edge).
21. I do not have a detailed survey of the highway but the appellant's drawing No 3107-005 indicates that the distance from the centre of the gates to the carriageway would be about 5m. This is consistent with the appellant's appeal document which indicates that the gates have been designed to be a minimum of 4m from the road edge.
22. I consider that a vehicle seeking to access the gates would most likely overhang the pavement and that it would not be exceptional for a vehicle to occupy the full width of the footway forcing pedestrians into the carriageway. The appeal property lies within an extensive residential area with nearby institutional and school premises. There is no pavement on the west side of the road beyond the junction and I have no reason to conclude that the roadside pavement would not be used by pedestrians. I am aware of measures that may be taken to remotely open gates but I am concerned that the reliability of such systems cannot be guaranteed. Further they are unlikely to be available for all potential visitors.

23. The Council's PGN6 has been adopted in order to ensure that new development does not compromise the safety of highway users (including pedestrians and cyclists). The proposal would fall well short of the adopted standard and I have not identified any reason why the recommendations of that guidance should not be required here.
24. On this issue I have concluded that the proposal would unacceptably detract from highway safety.

Conclusion

25. The National Planning Policy Framework indicates that planning should not seek to stifle innovation or originality; however it indicates that it is proper to seek to reinforce local distinctiveness. I agree with the comment in the Officer report that there is scope to achieve a modern design in this location, which is the appellant's objective, and that a remodelled house would not need to be identical to surrounding properties. However there remains a need to ensure that the resultant extended dwelling is well designed in itself and takes account of its context. I consider that as regards design, the relationship with neighbouring properties and highway safety the proposal fails to achieve those objectives.
26. I conclude that the proposal would unacceptably detract from the character and appearance of the area, it would be harmful to the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring dwellings as regards overlooking from the rear balcony and would compromise highway safety. For all of these reasons I have concluded that the appeal should not succeed.

Clive Tokley

INSPECTOR