
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 February 2020

by Helen O'Connor LLB MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 February 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C3620/D/19/3238984
42 Hatherwood, Ashted, Surrey KT22 8TT

- 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 Dennis Langley against the decision of Mole Valley District Council.
 - The application Ref MO/2019/0918/PLAH, dated 15 May 2019, was refused by notice dated 25 July 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as 'Loft conversion for a bedroom and ensuite. Also a single storey extension to the front, left side and rear of the property. Demolition of existing garage.'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. In my heading above I have taken the description of development from that used on the original planning application form.
3. The appellant has amended an annotation on the submitted drawing showing the proposed elevations such that the maximum increase in height would be 500mm over the existing roof ridge level as opposed to the 600mm originally detailed. Although I note the annotation relates to a scaled plan, this amendment is reasonably clear and does not amount to a fundamental change to the nature of the proposal. Moreover, I am satisfied that no party would be prejudiced by my taking account of it in making my determination. I have determined the appeal accordingly.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

5. Hatherwood is a residential road comprising of mostly detached dwellings built in the latter half of the 20th century. The regular plots, setbacks with an open aspect and mature planting result in a spacious, well-ordered layout. At the point nearest the appeal site, there is coherence derived from the consistent use of housing style, materials and form. Overall, this gives rise to a pleasant, ordered sub-urban character to the area.

6. 42 Hatherwood is a detached two-storey dwelling, fairly regularly spaced within a row of similar houses on the eastern side of the road facing towards an area of green open space. Generally, the height of the roof ridges of the dwellings are stepped to reflect the gentle slope of this section of Hatherwood. When this is combined with the homogeneity of house type, materials and roof pitches across this group of dwellings, the appearance of the appeal property conforms with, and positively contributes towards, the spacious ordered character of the area.
7. The proposal includes single storey extensions as well as alterations to the roof to provide additional accommodation. There is no dispute between the parties that the single storey additions would be in keeping with the character of the area and I have little basis to disagree. Therefore, the area of dispute principally relates to the impact of the proposed loft conversion.
8. The roof alterations would increase the height of the existing roof ridge by up to 500mm¹, thereby increasing the steepness of the roof pitch. This would disrupt the coherent stepping of the roof ridge levels along the row of houses within which the appeal site is situated. Although, the amount of the increase may not of itself be significant, and may overall, match the ridge height of 40 Hatherwood, in this context, the variance in the height pattern and difference in the roof pitch would have a discordant visual impact on the homogeneity of the property's appearance within the street scene. Moreover, this would be particularly obvious from the front and most public elevation of the building, which, in line with the nearby properties has a notably open aspect and can be seen in glimpses from across the green open space.
9. Furthermore, the development would introduce a large box roof dormer extension onto the majority of the rear facing roof slope which would have a similar height to the increased roof ridge level. This would considerably increase the bulk of the built form at the upper level and would add complexity to the roof form that would be disproportionate and at odds with the existing simple roof pitch.
10. Taken together, these factors would be harmful to the intrinsic ordered spacious character and appearance of the immediate area. Consequently, it would conflict with paragraph 127 c) of the National Planning Policy Framework which states that planning decisions should ensure that developments are sympathetic to the local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.
11. The appellant highlights that the visual impact of the dormer extension would be limited, given its rear facing position and the presence of mature planting along the rear boundary with 63 Stag Leys. Nevertheless, glimpses of the sides of the dormer would be possible from along Hatherwood, as well as in private views from other nearby houses and gardens in the road. Moreover, based on the limited information provided, the conifers referred to by the appellant appear to lie outside of his control. Accordingly, their presence and height cannot be relied upon to provide the current level of screening to dwellings sited to the east in the future.
12. Reference is made to similar loft conversions having taken place at 3 other houses in Hatherwood. Nos 18, 20 and 26 Hatherwood are mentioned in the

¹ Appellant's appeal statement revised annotation

Council's planning report. However, I have no details of those developments before me, which inhibits a meaningful comparison with the appeal proposal. Moreover, it is suggested by both parties that these were constructed under permitted development rights afforded to householders. In those circumstances, unlike the appeal proposal, the developments would not have been subject to assessment against the development plan policies.

13. Nevertheless, I observed these properties at my visit and noted they were some distance to the south of the appeal property and consequently, did not comprise part of the immediate context of dwellings already outlined. Furthermore, they were all of a different house type to the appeal dwelling. Therefore, these examples are not directly comparable with the proposal before me and as such, carry limited weight. In any event, I have determined the proposal on its own merits based on the evidence before me.
14. I have considered whether a split decision would be appropriate. However, cumulatively the proposed development amounts to a significant extension and alteration to the existing property as one entity. Based on the evidence presented, it is not clear that the respective elements, that relate to the same building, are clearly functionally severable such that a split decision would be appropriate in these circumstances.
15. Accordingly, I find that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area contrary to policy CS14 of The Mole Valley Local Development Framework, Core Strategy, October 2009 which, amongst other matters, requires new development to respect and enhance the character of the area.
16. In addition, it would conflict with policies ENV22, ENV23 and ENV32 of the Mole Valley Local Plan, October 2000. Policy ENV22 sets out general development control criteria which includes requirements that development should be appropriate in terms of its scale, form and appearance and furthermore, that it should respect the character and appearance of the locality. Policy ENV23 stipulates, amongst other things, that development will not be allowed if it is considered over-development of the site by reason of its scale, height or bulk. Finally, policy ENV32 sets out criteria specifically for house extensions which include that the development should retain the character and style of the existing property and not be unduly prominent in the immediate locality.
17. Although not cited on the decision notice, I have been provided with a copy of the Ashted Neighbourhood Forum, Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015-2026, December 2016, which forms part of the development plan for the area covering the appeal site. The proposal would conflict with policy AS-En3 which requires development to be visually integrated with its surroundings in order to maintain and retain the built character of the area.

Conclusion

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

Helen O'Connor

Inspector