The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 March 2020

by R E Jones BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3rd April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/D/19/3242764
Richmond House, Great North Road, Hatfield AL9 6DA

- 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 Ms Fariyal Khanbabi of PBARC against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
- The application Ref 6/2019/2057/HOUSE, dated 17 August 2019, was refused by notice dated 23 October 2019.
- The development proposed is described as: double height extension of 2.7m from the existing building line to the corner plot site.

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed, and planning permission is granted for the erection of a two-storey front extension at Richmond House, Great North Road, Hatfield AL9 6DA, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 6/2019/2057/HOUSE, dated 17 August 2019, subject to the following conditions:

   1) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this decision.

   2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in strict accordance with the following approved plans: plan number PRE001; plan number PRE002; plan number PRP001; plan number PRP002; plan number PRP003; plan number SIT001; and plan number SIT002.

   3) The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building.

Procedural Matter

2. In allowing this appeal, I have used the description of development referred to in the appeal form and the Council's refusal notice rather than that in the application form, as it more accurately describes the nature of the proposal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:

   - Whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework and any relevant development plan policies; and

- The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the existing dwelling and the surrounding area.

Reasons

Whether inappropriate development

4. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out the great importance that the Government attaches to Green Belts. It states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt, and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. At paragraph 145 it regards the construction of new buildings as inappropriate unless, amongst other things, it is the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

5. Policy GBSP1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 (WHDP) sets out the purposes of the Green Belt and that the Green Belt will be maintained. However, it is inconsistent with the Framework in so much as it does not list any of the exceptions to inappropriate development.

6. The Council also refers to emerging Policy SADM34 of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission 2016 (DLP). It takes a broadly similar approach to that detailed in the Framework but provides additional commentary on what would constitute a disproportionate extension. It states that a quantitative and qualitative assessment will be undertaken. It continues that proposals that would result in the footprint, volume and/or above ground external dimensions of a building being 50% greater than the original will generally be refused. However, the policy also states that any increase in footprint, volume and/or external appearance will also be considered as part of a qualitative assessment of the design elements relating to scale, bulk, massing within the context of the site. I have therefore given greater weight to this policy as well as the Framework, compared to the WHDP.

7. The Appeal property, a large detached dwelling, has a distinctive design that is characterised by its expansive asymmetrical roof profile. Part of the roof plane drops below the eaves line of the dwelling to form a catslide roof over an attached garage which itself projects from the front elevation, giving the dwelling an L shaped footprint.

8. According to the Council's calculations the proposed extension would result in the footprint of the original dwelling increasing by 19%, while the corresponding figure for the new floorspace created would be 22%. This is significantly below the 50% advised in the DLP. However, the question of proportionality involves other considerations as well as the quantitative assessment.

9. The roof structure of the proposed extension exhibits a long projection from the roof plane of the original house. Nevertheless, it would be set down approximately 2.3m from the roofline of the dwelling and appear subservient to its greater mass and prominence. In addition, the proposal's 2.7m projection from the front of the attached garage, would be proportionately modest when viewed in the context of the existing length of the dwelling, while generally maintaining the L shape form and footprint of the property.

10. I therefore conclude that the scheme would not constitute a disproportionate addition to the original building, and accordingly would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would accord with WHDP Policy GBSP1, the Framework, and with the emerging Policy SADM34 in the DLP. Having reached that conclusion, it is not necessary for me to go on to consider the impact on the Green Belt's openness.

Character and Appearance

11. Policies D1 and D2 of the WHDP require new developments to respect and relate to the character and context of the area and the design of developments should incorporate the design principles contained in the Supplementary Design Guidance 2005 (SDG). The SDG provides more specific guidance for residential extensions and states that, amongst other things, extensions should be designed to complement and reflect the design and character of the dwelling and be subordinate in scale.

12. The proposed extension displays a subordinate relationship with the host dwelling by the incorporation of a step down from the main ridge, while its vaulted roof space is likely to have a more reduced height than a two-storey extension with a more conventional roof crown. The design of the proposal has also sought to mirror the asymmetrical roof shape of the dwelling, albeit to a lesser scale. Further consistencies between the proposal and the dwelling include the matching materials along with window shape and detailing. Consequently, it is considered the proposal largely reflects the architectural language of the original dwelling.

13. The Council has referred to the depth and height of the proposal not being subordinate in scale to the host dwelling, yet it would display subordination by its significant set down from the main ridge. Moreover, it would add 2.7m in depth to the existing attached garage protrusion, a distance I consider to be reasonable in the context of the original dwelling's overall length.

14. The loss of the cat slide roof front projection, and its replacement with the proposed extension, would remove a distinctive part of the dwelling. Yet, the proposal would not fundamentally harm the existing roof profile of the dwelling, from which it derives its unique design, given that it would be set well below the ridgeline and continue to expose its inherent shape and form. Moreover, the proposal would continue the theme of a front addition projecting from the dwelling's primary frontage while also maintaining an L shaped building footprint.

15. I agree with the Council's view that the dwellings in the immediate locality of the site are mixed and that this allows for some flexibility in terms of the proposal's design. I observed during my site visit a large apartment building nearing completion on the adjoining land to the east of the appeal dwelling. This has a complex roof shape incorporating multiple pitches, gable projections and dormer windows. To the west are a line of dwellings that display an assortment of roof forms and dormer projections. Therefore, in my view, the proposed extension with its recessed ridgeline would not appear dominant or incongruous when viewed from the road given the prevailing architectural character along this part of Great North Road.

16. The proposal would not therefore harm the character and appearance of the existing dwelling or the surrounding area, and it would not conflict with WHDP

Policies D1 and D2, and the SDG. Additionally, it would not conflict with the broadly similar stance in the Framework, and in DLP Policy SP9.

Other Matter

17. I am referred to the Grade II listed building at Lower Farm, a large detached building characterised by a timbered façade. However, given the scale of the proposed development, the presence of structures in the intervening space, and the separation distance from the listed building, I do not consider that its setting would be harmed.

Conditions

18. I have found that the scheme would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and that it would not harm the character and appearance of the area. The appeal will therefore be allowed.

19. I have imposed the standard time limit condition and, in the interests of certainty, a condition requiring that the development be carried out in accordance with the approved plans. A condition relating to the construction of the extension in materials to match the dwelling is necessary to safeguard the character and appearance of the area.

Conclusion

20. Subject to the conditions referred to, and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is allowed.

R E Jones

INSPECTOR