



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 July 2020

by S J Lee BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: Friday, 21 August 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Z2830/W/19/3243947

Little Farm, Careys Road, Pury End, Towcester NN12 7NX

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr S Feven against South Northants District Council.
 - The application Ref S/2019/1255/FUL, is dated 19 June 2019.
 - The development proposed is a detached dwelling incorporating existing garage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr S Feven against South Northants District Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. The South Northamptonshire Part 2 Local Plan (SNLP2) was adopted on 22 July 2020. I am required to consider the appeal on the most up-to-date policies available. I asked for comments from the main parties on the implications of this for the appeal and have had regard to any comments received.
4. The appellant submitted an additional plan during consideration of the application that is not referred to in the Council's evidence. While the correspondence before me suggests this was before the Council, it is not clear whether it was subject to any form of consultation. The amendments proposed relate to the construction of a wall across the courtyard. This does not have a significant impact on the overall nature of the proposal. I am therefore satisfied that no interests would be prejudiced by my acceptance of the plan. I have considered the appeal on this basis.
5. The Council's evidence suggests that had they been in a position to make a decision on the application, they would have refused permission due to the design of the dwelling, its impact on local character and the living conditions of future occupants due to a lack of private amenity space.

Main Issues

6. Having regard to the above, the main issues are the effect of the development on (i) the character and appearance of the area, and (ii) the living conditions of future occupants, with particular regard to private amenity space.

Reasons

Character and appearance

7. The appeal relates to an area of open land which includes a large recently built detached garage. The site sits adjacent to Little Farm, with which the proposed dwelling would share an access. The proposal seeks to integrate the existing garage as one 'arm' of a U-shaped building, which would be arranged around a central courtyard. The central portion of the building would be the main two-storey element, with a half-hipped roof and projecting central gable feature. The other arm of the 'U' would be a single storey dual-pitched roof building that would angle slightly away from the main house. The materials would reflect those of the garage, which would be in-keeping with other buildings in the immediate area.
8. The appellant has indicated that they have attempted to reflect the style and layout of a farmstead that would be typical of those found in rural areas. The existing garage already abuts the side and rear boundary of the site. The two storey element would extend across the full length of the rear of the site, closely abutting the common boundary with properties on Lower Street. The other arm would be set tight against the hedgerow boundary with Little Farm. The appellant's revised plans suggest a 1.8 metre high stone wall would be constructed across the front of the courtyard, effectively closing off the open area to the front of the house.
9. Even taking account of the courtyard, shared access drive and open paddock opposite the site, the dwelling itself would still appear to have been uncomfortably squeezed into the available space. The proposed wall would create an even greater sense of enclosure and emphasise the lack of space around the building. However, with or without the wall in place, the dwelling would still appear unduly cramped and confined within its plot. The proximity of the building to the rear boundary, and the trees which line it, would be a particularly striking indicator of the tightly enclosed nature of the dwelling.
10. The Council has drawn my attention to the South Northamptonshire Design Guide (SNDG)(2017). This states both that hipped roofs are not characteristic of the local vernacular and that roof pitches should generally be above 45 degrees. Similarly, I note that the Paulerspury and Pury End Design Statement (PPEDS) states that roofs should be pitched to an angle of about 50 degrees and that roof flues should be avoided.
11. Although the appellant has questioned the status of the SNDG, I have no reason to believe that this has not been through a robust process and is an approved Supplementary Planning Document. Similarly, although the PPEDS appears to be relatively old, there is nothing to suggest that it does not reflect the prevailing character of Pury End. As such, it still provides a useful guide to what would be considered in-keeping with local character.
12. The half-hipped profile and shallow pitch of the roofs would not be consistent with the above guidance. The adjacent Little Farm farmhouse does however appear to be more reflective of the local vernacular and the form of development the guidance seeks to promote. The overt departure from this in terms of roof profile and pitch would not therefore complement the character of the existing dwelling.

13. Clearly, there is already some variety in roof profiles in Pury End, including those of more modern dwellings. However, these may have been built prior to the guidance being published. The appellant has also drawn my attention to examples of half-hipped and hipped roofs in the district. None of these are in Pury End. I also note that in some of the examples, the pitch angles of the roofs are at a steeper angle, more akin to those promoted in the above guidance. This appears to be particularly the case where the building is part of what appears to be a farmstead. In terms of the modern example at Whittlebury, I do not have the full details of that proposal or the circumstances in which it was permitted. However, the general design of the dwelling does not appear to reflect the agricultural farmstead approach that is being proposed here. These examples do not therefore weigh significantly in favour of the proposal.
14. The windows either side of the projecting gable would all be of different designs and sizes. The ground floor windows have been purportedly designed to reflect the doors of the garage. However, one side would be French doors and the other would be a four-light casement window. The windows at first floor level would be of different proportions, set at different heights in the elevation and the one above the French doors would be offset to one side. This would also have a 'hayloft door' type shutter, not seen elsewhere on the building. These quite striking differences would appear somewhat incoherent and unbalanced. This would detract from the overall design quality and appearance of the dwelling.
15. The Council also contend that the gable feature itself would not be characteristic of dwellings in the area or agricultural conversions. There is little evidence to suggest that such features are prevalent in the area. The appellant has drawn my attention to one example, but I do not have the full details of that proposal or the circumstances in which it was permitted. I cannot conclude with any certainty that the context is directly comparable to that before me. The style of fenestration in the feature itself, including what appears to be a balcony, would also fail to complement the prevailing character of the area.
16. The windows, along with those in the gable, would also result in a very low solid to void ratio. I am not persuaded that this would reflect the more simple and uncluttered style typical of rural farm buildings. Therefore, while the courtyard layout and materials may be reminiscent of a nineteenth century farmstead, the design and detailing of the main building would not fully reflect the local vernacular and would thus dilute and detract from this approach.
17. The development would not therefore reflect local character in terms of its roof profile or the large central gable feature. The fenestration is also confused, leading to a poorly designed and ill-conceived principal elevation. Individually, each of these factors may not result in a wholly unacceptable form of development. However, the sum of the individual parts would combine to create an uncharacteristic and unsympathetic addition to the village. This would also serve to exacerbate the harm caused by the overly cramped layout.
18. In coming to my conclusion, I have had regard to the level of screening that exists. Views from the roadside would be limited due to existing boundary treatments and the topography of the area. The roofline of the main part of the dwelling would be visible above the garage through the main access, but such views are likely to be fleeting in nature. The front elevation is likely to be

visible from the private views of dwellings further up Carey's Road. However, even from here the distance and intervening vegetation would limit its prominence. The rear elevation, and roofline, would be highly prominent from the private views of neighbouring properties on Lower Street. The proximity of the rear elevation, and large expanse of unbroken stone at first floor level, would provide some indication of the over intensive form of development.

19. Nevertheless, the visual impact of the development would be relatively localised. However, both local and national policy require development to be of a good standard of design. There is nothing to suggest that poorly designed and unsympathetic buildings are acceptable if they are not visually prominent.
20. While the self-contained nature of the site weighs in favour of the proposal, it would not adequately mitigate the failings of the design. I therefore find that the development would not constitute an acceptable quality of design and layout and would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. Accordingly, there would be conflict with policies SS2 and LH1 of the SNLP2 and the SNDG, which seek, amongst other things, to ensure development integrates with its surroundings and would not result in harm to the character of an area.
21. It would also conflict with paragraphs 124, 127 and 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which include expectations that development will function well, improve the overall quality of an area, is visually attractive as a result of good architecture and is sympathetic to local character.

Living conditions

22. The appellant sought to address the Council's concerns over the lack of privacy or security by proposing a 1.8 metre high stone wall across the front of the courtyard. I am satisfied this would address those particular issues.
23. However, the Council's statement also refers to the general lack of amenity space. The courtyard would constitute the only space available to future occupants. The Council has not drawn my attention to any space standards in the development plan. However, while the courtyard would provide some opportunity for sitting out or drying clothes, it would not be particularly generous for a dwelling of this size. The Council has also drawn my attention to the lack of recreational facilities in Pury End, which also highlights the importance of private space, particularly for outdoor play.
24. While the proposed wall would provide a degree of defensible space, I am not satisfied by the evidence before me that it would be of a sufficient scale for a dwelling of this size. This would tangibly diminish the enjoyment of the dwelling and its grounds to the material detriment of future occupiers' living conditions. Accordingly, there would be conflict with Policy H1 of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (2014) and Policy SS2 of the SNPL2. Amongst other things, these policies seek to ensure development has regard to the living conditions of future residents.

Other Matters

25. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) states that planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. I have found conflict with the

development plan with regard to the proposal's impact on local character and the living conditions of future residents.

26. The principle of development in this location is not in question. The development would provide one additional dwelling to the housing supply and provide support for the vitality of the village. However, the social and economic benefits of a single dwelling would not be of a significant scale.
27. The Council also raised no overriding concerns in relation to the impact of development on neighbouring properties, highways or any other factor not addressed above. However, a lack of harm in these respects is neutral and weighs neither for nor against the development.
28. In conclusion, there are no material considerations in this case that would lead me to a decision other than in accordance with the development plan.

Conclusion

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

S J Lee

INSPECTOR