
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 August 2020

by R E Jones BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 August 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/D/20/3246230

Mouldens, High Street, Long Wittenham, Abingdon OX14 4QH

- 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 Wilson against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref P19/S3108/HH, dated 3 October 2019, was refused by notice dated 18 December 2019.
 - The development proposed is the extension of existing garage to allow creation of first floor.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. The appeal comprises works that have already been undertaken. I observed the exterior of the appeal building, a detached garage, during my site visit, and its appearance was broadly in line with the plans submitted. Therefore, I have assessed the appeal on the basis that the appellant, is seeking consent for those elements now in place.
3. The Council determined the application for a garage building that will be used for ancillary use to the Mouldens and not as an independent dwelling. I have therefore determined this appeal on the same basis.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the garage on the character and appearance of the host property and the surrounding area, including the significance of the Long Wittenham Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site encompasses Mouldens, a detached two storey dwelling that along with a small number of other properties located along High Street, adjoins the Long Wittenham Conservation Area (LWCA), but is not located within it. The appeal development comprises a detached garage located a short distance to the rear of the dwelling and located close to the boundary with the rear access lane, known as Fieldside Lane.
6. The rear elevation of the Mouldens is characterised by its distinctive roof formation. It comprises two large gables set either side of a smaller gable that collectively project from the roof of the dwelling. This contributes to the dwelling having a balanced and symmetrical appearance when viewed from the rear access lane.

7. The appeal building has a bulky asymmetrical roof that significantly detracts from the balanced proportions of the dwelling's roof profile. Its discordance in relation to the host property is accentuated by the prominent fascias and soffits that unduly overhang its elevations giving the appeal building a top-heavy appearance. The corresponding fascias and soffits on the host dwelling are more in keeping and proportionate with the roof of the dwelling. Consequently, this disharmony in terms of scale and design between the host property and the appeal building creates an unacceptable relationship between the two structures.
8. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) defines the setting of a heritage asset as the surroundings in which it is experienced. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset; may affect the ability to appreciate that significance; or, may be neutral.
9. The part of the LWCA which backs onto Fieldside Lane, contrasts with the dwellings fronting High Street, in that, it comprises a number of detached buildings that are utilitarian in terms of their design. The simple architectural form of many of the buildings, and their proximity to the open pastureland the other side of Fieldside Lane, suggest that they were once used in connection with agriculture. They are typically a storey to a storey and a half in height, incorporate simple pitched roofs and traditional materials such as wood cladding and brick elevations and clay roof tiles. The uses are either ancillary garden buildings relating to properties fronting High Street or have been converted to dwellings. Consequently, these features contribute positively towards the setting of the LWCA, from which it derives some of its significance.
10. Although the appeal building is located outside of the LWCA, it immediately abuts it and is seen in context with the more traditional buildings within it, that line Fieldside Lane. With its angular uneven roof profile and flat top section, the garage does not appear in harmony with surrounding roofs which are predominately symmetrical and taper to form a slim ridge line. The appeal building's chunkier roof shape therefore appears incongruous in context with its surroundings.
11. This harm is accentuated by the excessive overhang of the fascias and soffits, while their white uPVC surface appears stark and glossy in the context of the weathered finishes of neighbouring buildings. Accordingly, the roof materials used to construct the garage contrast markedly with the more traditional building's that line the lane. Consequently, the appeal building's discordant presence will have a harmful effect on the setting of the conservation area.
12. The cladding used for the elevations of the garage has a wood effect that is finished in a pastel shade. This colour does not align well with the more muted tones of the brick and wood clad buildings along the lane. Nevertheless, the appellant indicates that it would be possible to paint the cladding, therefore if I were to allow the appeal a condition could be imposed to address this inconsistency to ensure the colour is more in keeping with surrounding finishes. I am also satisfied, following my observations during my site visit that this material finish is acceptable in the context of the area.
13. It is acknowledged that the garage is set back from Fieldside Lane and when approaching along the lane from the direction of Didcot Road, it will be concealed by The Old Stables. However, from the opposite direction, it is more prominent in the street and therefore harmful in this context.

14. The appeal development will accord with aspects of the Council's Supplementary Planning Document¹ (the SPD) in respect of its layout and scale. However, the SPD also requires proposals to have a roof form appropriate to the original building, and that it responds to and respects the character and appearance of the area and street scene. Based on my assessment, it is considered that the proposal does not accord with the guidance in the SPD in this regard.
15. The appellant has referred to the scale of outbuildings that are permitted development under Class E of the GDPO. The appeal scheme however exceeds those parameters in terms of its height, therefore I am unable to make a comparison with buildings that could be built under permitted development.
16. I note that the appeal building has had to be adapted from a previously approved development in order to comply with Building Regulations in respect of its internal height. Whilst this may meet those standards, it nevertheless results in a roof that is incongruous by virtue of its appearance, and on this basis the harm I have identified outweighs its compliance with head room standards.
17. The garage will be incongruous with its surroundings, but as it will affect a limited part of the conservation area and will be partially screened by The Old Stables, it will cause less than substantial harm in terms of the Framework. Accordingly, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Yet, the garage will not add to the supply of housing in the area and therefore there are no public benefits that will outweigh the harm. I note that the appeal building provides ancillary accommodation to the host dwelling, however, this is a private benefit and therefore not a matter that can be weighed against the harm to the LWCA.
18. For all these reasons, I conclude that the proposed development will cause material harm to the character and appearance of the host property and the surrounding area, including the significance of the LWCA. It will therefore be contrary to Policies CSEN3 and CSQ3 of the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy 2027, Policies CON7, H13, D1 and G2 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 and Policy LW4 of the Long Wittenham Neighbourhood Plan. Collectively, these require, amongst other things, that proposals conserve and enhance the historic significance of heritage assets, do not harm the character and appearance of conservation areas and respect the character of the dwelling, and its surroundings. The proposal is also contrary to the Framework, where it requires great weight to be given to the heritage asset's conservation.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons set out above, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

R. E. Jones

INSPECTOR

¹ South Oxfordshire Design Guide – Technical documents SPD 2016