



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 July 2020

by C Beeby BA (Hons) MIPROW

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 August 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/D/20/3248416

78 Hamerton Road, Alconbury Weston, Huntingdon PE28 4JD

- 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 Thomas and Mrs Rebecca Naegeli against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/02245/HHFUL, dated 6 November 2019, was refused by notice dated 21 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is the proposed demolition of a garage and a proposed replacement garage including a utility room to the side, a first floor store accessed via an external staircase and a bike/log store to the rear.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the setting of a nearby listed building and on the character or appearance of the Alconbury Weston Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The host dwelling is a Grade II listed building ("LB"). It is a timber framed cottage which dates, in part, to the 17th century. It has a substantial rear garden within which the garage which is proposed for demolition lies.
4. The LB's significance is greatly derived from its architectural and historic interest as a building dating back several centuries. This is evident within views from the highway, the adjacent public right of way and the dwelling's rear garden. Its spacious and verdant garden reflects its semi-rural location at the edge of the village and its likely close historic association with the surrounding countryside. Thus, the LB's setting contributes an important visual element to its significance.
5. The LB lies within the Alconbury Weston Conservation Area ("the CA"). This has a high number of mature trees, a central beck and a village green. The CA accommodates a number of historic dwellings within spacious gardens. As a result, natural form has a significant presence within the built environment. Outbuildings within gardens are generally of a subservient scale to their associated dwelling. The significance of the CA derives in part from these factors.

6. I have statutory duties when considering the effect of the proposal on the LB and the CA. Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ("the Act") requires me to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of the LB. Section 72 of the Act requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA.
7. Paragraphs 193 and 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) ("the Framework") advise that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification.
8. The appeal proposes the replacement of the existing garage by a building which would lie in a similar position and would have a considerably larger footprint and a greater height. Whilst the existing garage lies within views of the LB, it has a more modest scale and hence less prominence than that which is proposed.
9. The proposal would erode the verdant spaciousness which the garden contributes to the LB's setting by a significant increase in built form within it. This would have an urbanising effect on views of the LB framed by natural form which are available from the points noted above. The harm would be exacerbated by the location of the proposal on slightly higher ground than the LB, which would give the new garage additional prominence irrespective of its proposed lower ridge height than part of the LB. As a result of these factors, the development would visually compete with the LB. The proposal would consequently have a negative effect on its significance.
10. Turning to the proposal's effect on the CA, it would reduce the spacious appearance of the historic dwelling's garden due to the new garage's scale. Furthermore, it would fail to form a subservient outbuilding for the same reason. Thus, I conclude that the proposal would harm the site's contribution to the relevant defining characteristics of the CA, and that it would fail to preserve its appearance as a result.
11. I therefore conclude that the appeal proposal would result in less than substantial harm both to the setting of the LB and to the appearance of the CA. Thus, it conflicts with Policy LP11 and LP12 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 ("HLP"), which state that development should respond positively to its context. Further conflict exists with Policy LP34 of the HLP, which sets out that proposals must protect the significance of heritage assets and must preserve or enhance features which contribute positively to a CA's appearance.
12. Additional conflict exists with the Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2017), which provides support for new development which sits comfortably within its surroundings. Further conflict arises with historic environment guidance in the Framework. Additional conflict exists with guidance within the National Design Guide (2019), which states that development should respond positively to its surroundings and should have an appropriate scale.

Other Matters

13. The Council considers that conflict arises with paragraph 12 of the Framework. This sets out the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. However, as this is the basis on which appeals under Section 78 are considered, I do not believe that paragraph 12 has any specific relevance to the main issue of this appeal.
14. I acknowledge the stated household need for greater storage space, and I am sympathetic to this. Nevertheless, I am mindful of advice contained in the Planning Practice Guidance that in general planning is concerned with land use in the public interest. It is also probable that the proposed development would remain long after the current personal circumstances cease to be material. For these reasons, this factor is a benefit to which I can attach only minimal weight.
15. The appellants submit that the proposal would contribute to the preservation of the LB by the relocation of laundry facilities which currently cause high levels of condensation within the LB, because these are detrimental to the LB. However, there is minimal substantive evidence before me to support this submission. Accordingly, it is a matter to which I can attach only minimal weight.
16. I accept that the existing garage has a somewhat dilapidated appearance. Notwithstanding this, there is minimal evidence to suggest that the building is unsafe. Even if this were the case, a replacement building of a more comparable size would offer the same safety benefits as the appeal proposal. Thus, this is a submission which carries only minimal weight.
17. The proposed use of materials which would match those currently used for the garage is a relatively neutral matter which does not carry any particular weight.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

18. I have found the proposal to cause less than substantial harm in respect of two heritage assets. I am required to give each incidence of harm considerable importance and weight. I have identified no particular public benefits which weigh in favour of the proposal, and minimal other benefits.
19. Thus, for the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Beeby

INSPECTOR