



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 September 2020

by Conor Rafferty LLB (Hons), AIEMA, Solicitor

Decision by Chris Preston BA(Hons) BPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/K0235/D/20/3254427

11 Home Close, Sharnbrook MK44 1PQ

- 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 Smith against the decision of Bedford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00608/FUL, dated 11 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 22 April 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as 'single storey front and rear extension and two storey side extension'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by an Appeal Planning Officer whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Main Issue

3. The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the host building and the surrounding area.

Reasons for the Recommendation

4. The appeal site is located in Home Close, Sharnbrook and comprises a two storey semi-detached dwelling. The surrounding area is characterised by its residential nature and while there are several types of dwellings present a high level of consistency of style and scale exists within the grouping of each type. The appeal site sits in the middle of a group of semi-detached properties present on both sides of Home Close. An obvious and pleasing sense of symmetry exists between each pair due to the positioning of conjoined garages at the side of the dwellings, resulting in a visual gap at first floor level to the side of the majority of the properties. Whilst first floor side extensions have been constructed on other properties within the row on the same side of the Close, notably Nos 7 and 17, the design of those is subservient to the main dwelling, with lowered rooflines and/ or a set back from the front elevation. As such, the original symmetry of the row of semi-detached houses has not been unduly disturbed and a sense of openness is retained.
5. The proposed development relates to a single storey front and rear extension and a two storey side extension. This would introduce significant additional bulk to the currently modest dwelling which, due to being built flush with the main elevation,

would not appear subservient. While a pier would be added to the front elevation to create a sense of visual division, with no difference in height or building line the proposed extensions would nonetheless be read as a continuation of the main house rather than as a secondary addition. This would result in a dominant dwelling with a level of built form and dimensions that would not respect the character or appearance of the host building.

6. Due to this lack of distinction between the main dwelling and the extensions, the proposal would be contrary to the guidance of the Bedford Borough Council Design Guidance Residential Extensions, New Dwellings and Small Infill Developments, January 2000 (the Design Guidance). This acknowledges at paragraph E1 that extensions which follow the exact shape of the building can often unbalance its appearance and suggests that an extension should 'step down and back' so as to appear secondary to the main building. While the Design Guidance represents guidance rather than policy, it is nonetheless a material consideration in the determination of this appeal.
7. With regards to the effect of the proposal on the surrounding area, the additional built form at first floor level would result in the reduction of the visual gap between the appeal property and the neighbouring dwelling of No. 9. This gap is a defining characteristic of the group of dwellings within which the appeal site sits and the development of an extension here would offset the symmetry present between the appeal property and the attached neighbouring dwelling at No. 13. It would also reduce the overall coherence of this group of properties, leading to the proposal appearing as an incongruous addition in the setting.
8. In accordance with the submitted documents the resulting gap at first floor level would measure 1.01 metres to the side boundary. This is contrary to paragraph E3 of the Design Guidance which recommends that two storey extensions should be 1.5 metres away from any side boundary. While the appellant has argued that, as the garages for No. 11 and No. 9 are conjoined, the existing gap at the property is the 97cm space at ground floor level between the host dwelling and its garage and to extend this gap to 1.5 metre wide would not provide any practical benefit. However, the fact remains that the proposal would sufficiently reduce the visual gap present at the first floor level so as to appear out of place in the surrounding area.
9. The appellant has further argued that to achieve a ground floor level gap of 97cm and a first floor level of gap of 1.5m from the side boundary would require a step back which would complicate the appearance of the building and would not be in keeping with the street scene of Home Close. However, the Council's Design Guidance relating to the principle of setting down roof lines and setting back first floor side additions is based on widely recognised good design practice. I see no reason why adherence to those principles would unbalance the property or look out of place. As noted above, the first floor addition at No. 7 respects those principles and has enabled a reasonable extension which respect the original form of the street.
10. It is acknowledged that the property at No. 17 is the same style as No. 11 but benefits from a first floor level side extension such that the visual gap between it and No. 19 is less than 1.5 metres. However, this extension is noticeably subservient to the main dwelling and is located on the edge of the group of semi-detached dwellings such that No. 19 is of a different style. It therefore has a lessened impact on the overall coherence of the immediate streetscene when compared to the

proposal, which would be more imposing in nature and located in the middle of the group of highly similar semi-detached properties.

11. For all of the reasons given above I find that the development would have a significantly adverse visual effect on the character and appearance of the host building and the surrounding area. Accordingly, it would fail to comply with Policies 29 and 30 of the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030, adopted January 2020, and the Design Guidance.

Other considerations

12. The personal circumstances of the appellant are acknowledged, whereby they have suggested that the appeal property is required for the growing needs of the family. However, little detail is provided in this regard and, in any event, personal circumstances will seldom outweigh more general planning considerations. The matters raised in this instance do not attract sufficient weight in planning terms to override the harm that would arise.
13. Reference has been made to other examples of extensions in the surrounding area which are not stepped back and have left little space between neighbouring properties. However, limited information has been provided in terms of the circumstances through which those extensions were approved. In addition, a number of the examples appear to be of different house types in different street layouts. The symmetry and specific nature of the layout at Home Close has been a key element of my recommendation and I am not satisfied that those specific circumstances are replicated in the other examples. While consistency in decision making is important, this appeal is decided on its own site-specific circumstances and reference to other development nearby does not outweigh the harm identified above.
14. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that there are no objections to the proposal from the occupiers of neighbouring dwellings. However, this is not sufficient to outweigh the harm identified above.

Conclusion and Recommendation

15. Having had regard to all matters raised, I recommend that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Rafferty

APPEAL PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

16. I have considered all the submitted evidence and the Appeal Planning Officer's report, and, on that basis, I agree that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Preston

INSPECTOR