

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 October 2020

by M Cryan BA(Hons) DipTP MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 October 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Y0435/D/20/3252895

87 Stratford Road, Wolverton MK12 5LU

- 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 & Mrs Naylor against the decision of Milton Keynes Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00570/FUL, dated 2 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 28 April 2020.
 - The development proposed is a loft conversion with a rear box dormer.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed dormer on the character and appearance of the Wolverton Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal property is a mid-terrace house, sitting within the Wolverton Conservation Area (the Area). I therefore have a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Area. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that they should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance (paragraph 184). It goes on to advise that any harm or loss requires clear and convincing justification (paragraph 194) and that any harm that is less than substantial must be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal (paragraph 196).
4. From the evidence before me and my observations on my site visit, I consider that the significance of the Area is defined by, among other things, its status as a very early centre for railway engineering, and the mix of housing, commercial areas and public buildings which grew up to serve the railway works. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century terraced housing is characterised by an almost exclusive use of brick and slate. There are differences in design and detailing between blocks and streets, but the overall consistency of scale and materials gives the housing throughout the Area a solid appearance and an orderly character. Long vistas of the terraces and their roofscapes are found throughout the Area, including from the lanes behind the main residential streets. The Area is covered by an Article 4 Direction removing some permitted development rights, although this only applies to front and side elevations and the development in this case would be to the rear facing the back lane.

5. The proposal is to convert the loft to provide an additional room, facilitated by the installation of a box dormer on the rear roof slope extending in part over the rear outrigger. This would be set slightly below the existing main roof ridge and above the rear eaves, occupying almost all of the rear roof slope. It would significantly increase the bulk of the roof, and severely disrupt the visual coherence of the rear roofscape of the terrace. Although it would not be visible from Stratford Road at the front of the appeal property, it would be prominent when seen from the back lane or from the rear of properties in Church Street. From those viewpoints it would appear as an incongruous addition to the terrace.
6. The appellants have drawn my attention to other dormers in the Area, including at No 71 Stratford Road in the next block east of the appeal site. In permitting that development, the Council referred to an appeal elsewhere in the Area where an Inspector had concluded that a rear dormer need not necessarily be intrusive or harmful to a Conservation Area. I accept that as a statement of principle, but nonetheless must determine this appeal on the basis of all the evidence before me. There are similarities between the rear dormer at No 71 and the current proposal in terms of size and style. I saw on my site visit that the back lane is rather more hemmed in by outbuildings and boundary walls in the vicinity of No 71, so although that dormer can be seen from the lane it is slightly less prominent in public views than would be the case here. Even so, the bulk of the dormer at No 71 has had a negative effect on the character and appearance of its terrace, and in my view it should not be used as a precedent for further similar developments.
7. The appellant has referred to three further dormers which have been permitted elsewhere in Wolverton, although I do not have details which would enable me to draw comparisons with the case before me. I observed some other rear dormers in the vicinity of the appeal site at the time of my site visit, but they do not appear to be common within the surrounding area. Those few I did see, other than that at No 71, tended to be narrower or set high on the roof slope, and therefore smaller and less intrusive, than that proposed in this case.
8. I conclude that the proposed dormer would be detrimental to the appearance of the host property, and would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wolverton Conservation Area. Given the size of the Area as a whole, in the Framework's terms the harm to its significance as a designated heritage asset would be less than substantial. However, no public benefits arising from the scheme have been identified.
9. The development therefore conflicts with Policies D1, D3 and HE1 of the 2019 *Plan:MK 2016-2031*. Together these policies seek to ensure that development is well-designed and responds appropriately to its surroundings, and that heritage assets including Conservation Areas are respected and protected. The proposal also conflicts with the provisions of the Framework which seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment.

Conclusion

10. For the reasons given above the appeal is dismissed.

M Cryan

Inspector