



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 January 2021

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13th January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/J1915/D/20/3259373

66 High Street, Walkern, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 7PG

- 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 Perry against the decision of East Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 3/20/0772/HH, dated 20 April 2020, was refused by notice dated 23 June 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as 'demolition of rear extension and part demolition of out building attached to garage. Two storey rear extension and creation of link to new garage with 2 storey rear extension. External refurbishment of existing windows.'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The description in the banner heading above is taken from the application form. At Part E of the appeal form, it is stated that the description of development has not changed. Nevertheless, a different wording has been entered, describing the proposal as 'demolition of rear extension and demolition of outbuilding attached to garage. Erection of part single, part two storey rear extension. Installation of replacement windows to entire house. Retention of temporary annexe for the duration of work to the main dwelling'. As this reflects the description stated on the Council's decision notice and I consider it a more accurate representation of the proposal shown on the submitted plans, I have determined the appeal accordingly.
3. No response was received to a request to the appellant for access onto the site for my visit on the date noted above. Nevertheless, I was satisfied that I was able to see all necessary features from the surrounding area and therefore carried out my site visit on an unaccompanied basis.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - i) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the Walkern Conservation Area; and
 - ii) the effect of the proposal on the living conditions of the occupiers of Stafford House and 64 High Street with particular regard to light and outlook.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. The appeal site is within the Walkern Conservation Area (CA) and comprises a deep but fairly narrow plot which includes a detached dwelling fronting the High Street. The CA centres around the High Street, where buildings of varied but typically traditional styles are arranged along fairly strong building lines fronting either side of the street, with interspersed areas of open space. Buildings vary in depth and some have outbuildings or other structure to the rear. Nevertheless, those parts of buildings fronting the street are of generally greater scale and thus prominence, and the overall layout emphasises the broadly linear form of the village and its relationship with the surrounding rural landscape which is also apparent in views between a number of the buildings. In my view, this pattern of development, together with the attractive detailing and materials retained to many of the buildings add much to the character and appearance, and thus significance of the CA.
6. The position of the main two-storey dwelling on the appeal site close to the High Street and spacing to its sides means that it is fairly prominent in views from the street scene. It includes varied projections to the rear, although these are of lesser visual impact and prominence as a result of their lower height and their set back from the street. The building also retains many traditional features, and for these reasons, I find that it makes a positive contribution to the CA.
7. I see no reason from the information before me to disagree with the Council's view that demolition of the rear parts of the appeal building may be justified given their condition. In addition, I do not find that the scale of the two-storey and single-storey link sections of the proposed extensions, which would be no wider than the host dwelling, would be excessive with regard to the existing development on the site. The form and design of these elements would also be sympathetic to the host dwelling, and their visual impact on the street scene and CA would be fairly limited.
8. However, the extension would also include a further section with first-floor accommodation. This deepest section of the extension would be of considerable bulk and mass as a result of its large width and depth, both of which would exceed the dimensions of the retained part of the building, and would result in a substantial spread of development beyond the rear of the host dwelling. The roof to this part of the extension would also be higher than the existing rear section of the building and the eaves of the host dwelling. Dormer additions would occupy much of the depth of its roofslopes, and the bulky pitched roof form would add further to the scale and upper mass of this part of the development. These factors in combination would cause the extension to appear oversized and disproportionate against the host dwelling.
9. Moreover, the shallow pitched roof to the deepest section of the extension would be incongruous and out of keeping with the steeper pitch typical to roofs within the wider CA, and would appear discordant against the form and angle of the host dwelling roof. The use of UPVC windows and doors to both the extension and within the retained part of the dwelling would additionally contrast with the timber materials that I saw were characteristic within the CA, further compounding the unsympathetic nature of the proposal.

10. I note that the proposal includes reductions in ground levels, but the visual impact of the built form on the site would be increased according to the additional depth, height and overall scale of the extensions. The appellant suggests that there would be limited views of the development, but I saw that it would be apparent, including from the High Street to the front of the site where the rear of the extension would project wider than the host dwelling, as well as in views along the track beside 68 High Street. It would also be visible from Kitcheners Lane between 64 High Street and Stafford House. In these views, I find that the development would be jarring, and would dominate and overwhelm the appeal dwelling. This would be to the detriment of its character and appearance, and to the positive contribution that it makes to the CA.
11. In accordance with s72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, I am required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Walkern CA. For the reasons above, I find that the proposal would result in significant harm to the character and the appearance of the CA and thus its significance. Given the scale of the development and that visual impacts would be relatively localised, I find that harm to the CA would be less than substantial in the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which goes on to advise that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of development.
12. The appeal dwelling is not currently occupied. The proposal would enlarge the dwelling and help to facilitate family living, and I do not doubt that it would offer improved living standards which would benefit future occupiers. However, while I acknowledge the existing dwelling is in need of some renovation, there is no firm evidence before me to show that future residential use could not be secured in the absence of the extensions before me, or that the building could not otherwise be retained.
13. The harm to the significance of the CA would be less than substantial, but I nevertheless give this harm considerable importance and weight in accordance with the Framework. In this context, I find that the public benefits of the proposal would not outweigh the harm that it would cause.
14. For these reasons, I conclude on this main issue that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the character and the appearance of the Walkern CA. It would accordingly conflict with Policies VILL1, HOU11, DES4, HA1 and HA4 of the East Herts District Plan 2018 (DP) and Policies 3 and 12 of the Walkern Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2018. Collectively, these policies broadly require preservation and where possible enhancement of the historic environment including the Walkern CA, and seek well-designed development of an appropriate scale, mass, form, design and materials and which reflects local distinctiveness.

Living Conditions

15. For much of the depth of the extensions, there would be significant separation to the boundary with 64 High Street. This would reduce somewhat to the side of the rear section of the extension, but it would be similar to the existing spacing at the rear of the appeal building and would retain views from the site of No 64 between the extension and the adjacent building at Stafford House. The scale of the rear part of the extension would be greater than currently, but the increase in height would be fairly small, and the additional bulk would largely result from the depth of development beyond the existing building, further from No 64. These factors would limit the visual impact as seen from

- this neighbour. Given also the separation that would be retained to the boundary and the rear of No 64, I am satisfied that the extension would not become unacceptably dominant, and that it would not result in a significant increase in the degree of enclosure above that already experienced by occupiers or cause a harmful loss of outlook. Similarly, and in view of the fairly limited height of the rear part of the extension, I find that it would not cause harm to the quality of life of these occupiers through a significant loss of light.
16. However, there would be much less separation between the rear part of the extension and the facing windows and garden serving Stafford House. I note that Stafford House has been reduced in size and that there is ongoing construction for a new property adjacent to it, but the proposal would nevertheless result in development spreading along a significant proportion of its boundary with the appeal site. The bulky pitched roof of the rear part of the extension would add mass to the upper level of this closest section, and I find that its height, depth and bulk in combination with its very close proximity to the rear windows and garden of Stafford House would lead to a degree of enclosure and loss of outlook that would be oppressive. Given the position of the extension to the south of this neighbour, it would also be likely to cause some overshadowing and a loss of light.
17. I therefore conclude on this main issue that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of Stafford House. As a consequence, it would conflict with Policy DES4 of the DP which includes a requirement that development avoids significant detrimental impacts on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers.

Other Matters

18. The proposal includes an annexe to the rear of the site. While mindful that this was not a reason for refusal of the application, I note that the annexe would be beyond Walkern village and within the 'Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt', and I have no firm evidence that the annexe would meet the requirements of Policy GBR2 of the DP which is concerned with development within this area. Moreover, the parties have described the annexe as temporary for the duration of work to the main dwelling. I have no substantive evidence that the annexe would be otherwise required or sought independently of the works proposed to the dwelling which I have found for the reasons above to be unacceptable, and since it could not alter my findings on the main issues, I have not pursued this matter further.
19. The appellant comments that many neighbouring properties have extensions and that the relationship of the development with neighbouring properties is a common feature in historic village centres and in Walkern. However, no details have been submitted in this regard and therefore I can only give this matter limited weight. In any event, I have determined the appeal before me on its own planning merits and found that it would cause harm.
20. The appellant has made changes following refusal of earlier proposals on the site. I also acknowledge comments regarding communication and advice given by the Council, but these are not factors which alter my conclusions on the planning merits of the proposal. That direct neighbours of the site have not submitted objections to the proposal is a neutral factor which weighs neither for nor against the proposal.

21. The Council advises that the proposal is supported by a bat report which considers the potential of the site to support roosting bats and provides a suitable outline mitigation strategy, and comments that a follow-up emergence survey could be secured by condition ensuring that protected species would not be harmed. From the information before me, I have no reason to reach an alternative view. However, this is also a neutral factor and does not weigh in favour of the proposal.

Conclusion

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

J Bowyer
INSPECTOR