



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 12 January 2021

by S J Lee BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 January 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/D/20/3263852

26 Avenue Road, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 1LJ

- 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 K & G McMorran against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00637/HHFUL, dated 31 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 7 September 2020.
 - The development proposed is a 2 storey side extension
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the St Neots Conservation Area (SNCA).

Reasons

3. The appeal relates to a semi-detached property within the SNCA. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special attention is paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of Conservation Areas. This is largely reflected in paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which states that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets.
4. The St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment (CACA) (2006) indicates that the significance of the SNCA lies in its historic form and layout, including the changes that have taken place over time, and the quality of its urban form. The site lies within the Avenue Road (West) character area, but the style of housing is likely more reflective of Avenue Road (East), which includes a greater proportion of detached or semi-detached dwellings set back within their plots.
5. The extension would effectively fill in the recessed area to the side of the main elevation. This would undermine the largely balanced and symmetrical appearance of the semi-detached pair. The development would also lead to a change in the roof profile of the dwelling. In particular, the slope would increase in length which in turn would result in a reduction in eaves height. Another consequence of this would be that the roof slope would cut across the existing rear wall. The difference in eave heights between the new and existing

roof elements would create an awkward visual relationship. The new first floor window would also be noticeably smaller than what currently exists. This would emphasise the visual imbalance between the dwellings. As a whole, this would not represent a good quality of design and would be an unsympathetic alteration to the host dwelling and the semi-detached pair.

6. Although the visual impact would be relatively localised, the differences in building line and eaves heights would still stand out as incongruous alterations. In coming to this conclusion, I have had regard to the variety of built form that exists on Avenue Road as a whole. However, although there is no uniformity in terms of style of housing, architecture, or age, many of the buildings have retained their original characters. This has helped to maintain the quality of the street scene. The development would erode this quality.
7. The appellant has drawn my attention to a number of examples of alterations that have been made in the immediate area, including where asymmetry has been introduced. I had the opportunity to view these during my visit. However, none of the examples I saw are directly comparable in terms of design or appearance to that before me. Furthermore, I do not have the full details for all of these developments or the circumstances in which most were permitted.
8. However, some of the alterations, including the example of the garage directly opposite the site, do not persuade me that all alterations within the conservation area are sympathetic. It is also clear that in some cases, the Council concluded that the developments would not be harmful. They have come to a different judgement on the appeal proposal and I broadly agree with their conclusions in this case. Furthermore, I saw that the majority of semi-detached dwellings on Avenue Road have largely maintained their symmetrical appearance. This is particularly the case in relation to rooflines and eaves heights. The examples given are therefore in the minority and do not justify any further erosion of the character and appearance of the street scene. As such, these examples add little weight in favour of the proposal and do not lead me to alter my conclusion.
9. I therefore find that the development would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the SNCA. Accordingly, there would be conflict with policies LP12 and LP34 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan (2019) which seek, amongst other things, to ensure development contributes positively to the area's identity and preserves the character and appearance of Conservation Areas.
10. The harm to the significance of the SNCA would be 'less than substantial'. In this context, paragraph 196 of the Framework requires the harm to be balanced against any public benefits. I shall turn to this matter below.

Other Matters & Planning Balance

11. I understand the wishes of the appellants to provide additional living space. However, the benefits derived from this would be private in nature and thus does not weigh against the harm to the Conservation Area. The appellant has suggested the extension would 'future proof' the dwelling. Nevertheless, there is nothing to suggest that the dwelling is not fit for purpose in its current form. I have therefore not given this argument any weight in my decision.
12. I acknowledge that the Town Council did not object to the proposal. There would also be no harm in relation to the living conditions of neighbours.

However, a lack of harm would be neutral and neither weigh for or against the proposal. These factors do not therefore alter my decision.

13. The Council's officer report refers to the tree which is in close proximity to the front of the dwelling. The report is however unclear as to the Council's position on the impact on the tree. There is also no specific reference to this in the decision notice. Given my findings above, this is not something that I need to consider in further detail at this time.
14. Having regard to the above, there are no public benefits in this case which outweigh the less than substantial harm identified. Neither are there any other material considerations that would justify a decision other than in accordance with the Development Plan.

Conclusion

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

S J Lee

INSPECTOR