



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 February 2021

by M Russell BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/D/20/3263252

26 Avenue Road, St Neots 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 Barnard against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/01281/HHFUL, dated 24 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 2 September 2020.
 - The development proposed was originally described as 'loft conversion with dormer to rear roofslope'.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The parties suggested access would be required to the rear of the property given the location of the development on the rear roof slope. On arrival at the previously agreed day and time, I was unable to gain access to the rear of the property. However, I was still able to obtain a full appreciation of the surrounding context of the CA and a view of the rear roof slope from East Street. On this basis, I am content that I am in a position to assess the main issue and proceed with my decision.
3. The description of development on the planning application forms refers to a single dormer. I have considered the appeal on the basis of the revised scheme before the Council when it made its decision which proposed two dormers to the rear roof slope.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether or not the proposed development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the St Neots Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

5. The appeal site is situated within the St Neots locality of the CA as identified in the St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment (2006) (SNCACA). The significance of this part of the CA derives from the architecture of its historic core, which demonstrates its importance as a trading and commercial centre from the 17th century onwards, and the neighbourhoods of its late 19th and 20th century expansion which are typified by regular, rectangular street patterns laid out within earlier town enclosures.

6. Avenue Road is mainly characterised by two-storey detached and semi-detached dwellings. There is some variety in style, materials, plot widths and the position of some of the dwellings relative to front boundaries as one travels between the eastern and western sections of the road. Even so, there is general regularity to the scale of buildings and traditional pitched roof forms are a common characteristic of the area. Where roof spaces are used for habitable accommodation, these are mainly served by roof light windows or windows to side gables. The general simplicity and consistency to the roofscape makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the CA and adds to its significance.
7. On my site visit, I observed the rear roof slopes of many of the dwellings in this part of the CA, including those on Avenue Road which are visible through the gaps between the dwellings on East Street. It was evident that rear dormers are not a predominant feature of the area. The flat roofed dormers would be out of keeping with the simple pitched roof forms seen more generally within the CA. The incongruity of the dormers would be appreciable in views within the CA both through gaps between buildings on East Street and from the rear gardens and windows serving some of the surrounding properties.
8. Whether or not the dormers would be tile hung or would incorporate more traditional materials to their frames, this would be unlikely to disguise the vertical position of the windows relative to the roof slope or the flat roofed form of the dormers. My attention has been drawn to several developments in the wider area. I am not aware of the full details of these developments or the material considerations that were relevant in those particular instances. In any case, they do not persuade me that flat roofed rear dormer windows are a defining characteristic of the area nor that the development proposed would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA.
9. Paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) states 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). Paragraph 194 of the Framework states that 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.
10. Having regard to the relatively small scale of the development and its likely level of prominence, the development would result in less than substantial harm to the character and appearance of the CA. Paragraph 196 of the Framework states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
11. The development would provide a private benefit to the occupiers of the dwelling through the provision of additional habitable accommodation. However, this would not amount to a public benefit which would outweigh the less than substantial harm to the CA and the great weight I must attach to its conservation.
12. I conclude, the development would neither preserve nor enhance the character or appearance of the CA. In that regard, the development would conflict with

the parts that seek to ensure that development is well designed, contributes positively to the area's character and identity and conserves heritage assets in Policies LP12 (Design Implementation) and Policy LP34 (Heritage Assets and their Settings) of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (adopted 2019) and the Framework.

Conclusion

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

M Russell

INSPECTOR