
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 25 May 2021

by Tom Gilbert-Wooldridge BA (Hons) MTP MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17th June 2021

Appeal A Ref: APP/B1930/W/20/3256314

Astridge Farm, Lamer Lane, Gustard Wood, Wheathampstead, St Albans, Herts AL4 8LA

- 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 Bernard Palmer against the decision of St Albans City & District Council.
 - The application Ref 5/20/0479, dated 18 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 1 May 2020.
 - The development proposed was originally described as two storey rear extension.
-

Appeal B Ref: APP/B1930/Y/20/3256318

Astridge Farm, Lamer Lane, Gustard Wood, Wheathampstead, St Albans, Herts AL4 8LA

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Bernard Palmer against the decision of St Albans City & District Council.
 - The application Ref 5/20/0480LB, dated 18 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 1 May 2020.
 - The works proposed were originally described as two storey rear extension.
-

Decision Appeal A

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Decision Appeal B

2. The appeal is allowed and listed building consent is granted for two storey rear extension, side dormer window, associated internal alterations, and alterations to retaining wall at Astridge Farm, Lamer Lane, Gustard Wood, Wheathampstead, St Albans, Herts AL4 8LA in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 5/20/0480LB dated 18 February 2020 and the plans submitted with it subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The works authorised by this consent shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this consent.
 - 2) No works shall take place until samples of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the works hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Procedural Matters

3. The Council's decision notices refer to a side dormer window and alterations to retaining wall for the description of the development in Appeal A, and add the same wording plus associated internal alterations for the description of the works in Appeal B. For clarity and consistency, the formal decision for Appeal B above uses this additional wording.

Main Issues

4. The main issue for both appeals is the effect of the proposal on the special interest of the Grade II listed building known as Astridge Farmhouse.
5. The main issues for Appeal A only are:
 - (a) whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and any relevant development plan policies;
 - (b) the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt; and
 - (c) if the proposal would be inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of its inappropriateness and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Reasons

Listed building

6. Astridge Farmhouse is a 15th century house that was altered and extended in the 17th century and has a late 18th century façade of red brick. The oldest part of the house is the front range, with many architectural details including chimney stacks, timber casement windows and an exposed timber frame on one flank elevation. The special interest and significance of the listed building is informed greatly by this range which has particular architectural and historic interest as a good example of a late medieval and early modern house.
7. The house is surrounded by a very large garden with a considerable amount of planting including trees which reinforces the location's rural setting. A short distance to the south-west of the house are a number of timber framed buildings that seem to have originally been used for agriculture and stables but now appear to be in domestic/workshop use. These buildings contribute positively to the special interest and significance of the listed building as part of the historic farmstead.
8. The house has been extended to the rear since the 1980s with a mix of single and two storey elements forming a wing perpendicular to the front range. These extensions have doubled the size of the house but they respect the older parts of the house in terms of materials, design and scale, with the ridge heights stepping down from the front range. The extensions are not readily visible approaching the house along the driveway. From the surrounding grounds they complement rather than detract from the special interest and significance of the listed building.
9. The proposal would add approximately 3 metres to the end of the modern rear wing. While this would increase the size of the modern additions further, it

would be a modest amount of new building and would maintain the architectural detailing and proportions of the rear wing. It would not lead to the modern extensions visually dominating the front range as it would still be possible to appreciate and identify the latter in views from the front, side and rear.

10. The extension would result in the loss of a mature cherry tree, but the rest of the garden's extensive trees and planting would remain including nearby shrubs and another tree. The chimney breast at the end of the existing wing would be subsumed into the new extension, but it is not unusual to see just the chimney stack protruding above the ridgeline of a building.
11. In conclusion, the proposal in both appeals would preserve the special interest of the listed building. Therefore, it would accord with Policy 86 of the St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994 (LPR) which, amongst other things, requires proposals to preserve listed buildings and resists extensions that dominate, mask, unbalance or otherwise detract from a listed building by reason of their scale, materials, siting or design. It would also accord with LPR Policy 69 which requires a high standard of design having regard to context and materials. The proposal would also accord with NPPF paragraphs 192 and 193 which seek to sustain and enhance the significance of heritage assets, with great weight given to the conservation of designated heritage assets when considering the impact of a proposal on its significance.

Whether inappropriate development in the Green Belt

12. The site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt. NPPF paragraph 145 regards the construction of new buildings as inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless it relates to a number of listed exceptions. Paragraph 145(c) relates to the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.
13. LPR Policy 1 sets out the type of development that will be permitted within the Green Belt. No reference is made in this policy to extensions of a building, but LPR Policy 13 deals with this matter in terms of dwellings. It states that extensions to houses may be permitted unless the scale or visual impact on the building as originally constructed (or as existing at 1 July 1948 if constructed before that date) would create a building of significantly larger or different character.
14. The Residential Extensions and Replacement Dwellings in the Green Belt Supplementary Planning Guidance 2004 (SPG) sets out how LPR Policy 13 might be applied. For residential extensions, a total of 8 criteria are set out in the SPG. Criterion (i) confirms that an increase in cubic content of 90-180m³ or an increase in floorspace of 20-40% may be acceptable subject to performance against criteria (ii) to (viii).
15. The parties agree that rear extensions are generally viewed more favourably and the proposal would not be visible from public viewpoints or infill any gaps between dwellings. Based on my findings above, the proposal would not harm the listed building while the loss of the cherry tree would not have a noticeable effect on landscaping and trees within the area. There would be no conflict with LPR Policy 72 which deals with extensions in residential areas. Thus, the proposal performs well against criteria (iii) to (viii) in the SPG.

16. In terms of criterion (ii) and previous extensions, it is not disputed by the parties that the original (pre 1 July 1948) floorspace of the dwelling is 205.1m² or that the previous extensions to the property have a floorspace of 240.5m² which is a 117% increase over the original. The proposed extension would add around 40m² bringing the total extension floorspace to 280.5m², which is an increase over the original of 136.7%. The volume of the previous extensions is 760m³ and the proposed extension would equate to 117.4m³.
17. On the basis of the above figures, the previous extensions have already added significantly to the original building by more than doubling the floorspace while the additional volume is considerable. Thus, the proposal would perform poorly against criterion (ii) and would exceed the limits set out in criterion (i).
18. The SPG clarifies that existing garages and outbuildings will only be included as part of the original floorspace if they were built at the same time or existed at 1 July 1948 and are integral to the original dwelling. The existing outbuildings clearly date from before 1 July 1948 and appear to have been closely connected to the dwelling as part of a historic farmstead. The appellants argue that if the floorspace from the outbuildings is used, the original floorspace would be approximately 544m² or 750m² depending on how many outbuildings are included. As a result, the appellants note that the previous and proposed extensions combined would equate to an increase in floorspace of either 51% or 37% depending on the number of outbuildings used in the calculations. The latter would fall within the upper limits in the SPG.
19. However, I have insufficient information on the current use of each of the outbuildings. On site, I noticed that one was named Willow Cottage indicating that it might now be a separate residential unit. Moreover, I am unable to verify the appellant's figures in terms of the outbuildings' floorspace and I note that they are estimates. Therefore, I cannot take the outbuildings into account as integral to the original dwelling.
20. Based on the evidence before me, the proposal would result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building and so would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt contrary to NPPF paragraph 145.

Effect on the openness of the Green Belt

21. NPPF paragraph 133 states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
22. The proposed extension would not be highly visible. There are multiple historic and modern outbuildings within the surrounding grounds and the site would not appear much more built up after the extension's completion. In spatial terms, there would only be a minor incursion into the Green Belt and a minor negative effect on openness. Nevertheless, there would be conflict with RLP Policy 13 which seeks to avoid a building of significantly larger or different character.

Other considerations

23. NPPF paragraph 143 indicates that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The proposed development would also result in harm in terms of the openness of the Green Belt. NPPF paragraph 144 states that substantial

weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

24. The appellants seek the proposed extension to provide additional living accommodation as they get older and potentially need carers to stay within the property. However, this is a private benefit and as such can only be afforded very limited weight.
25. As a consequence, the other considerations do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the very special circumstances necessary to justify the proposal do not exist. Thus, the proposal in Appeal A would not accord with LPR Policies 1 or 13 or the aims of the NPPF which seek to protect Green Belt land from inappropriate development.

Conclusions

26. The proposal in terms of Appeal A would preserve the special interest of Astridge Farmhouse as a listed building but would result in harm to the Green Belt. For these reasons, and having had regard to all matters raised, I conclude that Appeal A should be dismissed.
27. The proposal in terms of Appeal B would preserve the special interest of Astridge Farmhouse as a listed building. Therefore, there is no reason to withhold listed building consent even though it cannot be implemented without a valid planning permission. As such, I conclude that Appeal B should be allowed. The formal decision above requires the works to be in accordance with the submitted plans. In addition to the standard time limit condition, it is necessary to impose a condition relating to materials to ensure a satisfactory effect on the listed building.

Tom Gilbert-Wooldridge

INSPECTOR