
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 July 2021

by J D Westbrook BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 July 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/J1915/D/21/3272473

17 Stringers Lane, Aston, STEVENAGE, SG2 7EF

- 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 Chris Buckhurst against the decision of East Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 3/21/0075/HH, dated 12 January 2021, was refused by notice dated 9 March 2021.
 - The development proposed is alterations to the roof to create an en-suite bathroom.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for alterations to the roof to create an en-suite bathroom at 17 Stringers Lane, Aston, STEVENAGE, SG2 7EF in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 3/21/0075/HH, dated 12 January 2021, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 200701/1 Issue E; 200701/2 Issue H.
 - 3) The materials to be used in the construction of the vertical external surfaces of the extension hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building in type and/or colour.

Main Issue

2. The appeal property is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt, but the council accepts that the proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. I concur with that view. In the light of this, the main issue is the effect of the proposed roof alterations on the character and appearance of the Aston Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. No 17 is a semi-detached house situated on the south-eastern side of Stringers Lane. In common with other houses on this part of the road, it has a small single-storey side extension with a pitched roof. The proposed development would involve an alteration to the rear roof pitch of the side extension to include a small, dormer-type structure in the upper portion. This dormer would have a rendered side elevation to match the existing; a glazed, almost flat roof; and a timber boarded rear elevation.

4. The houses on Stringers Lane form the south-eastern boundary of both Aston village and the Aston Conservation Area (CA). There are open fields to the east and a cricket field to the west. The land slopes up from north-east to south-west, and the row of semi-detached houses that includes the appeal property lie above the level of the road. In the light of this, No 17 is situated around 1 metre above road level and around 70 cm below the level of No 19, which is the northernmost of the adjacent pair of dwellings. There is a 3m high roadside hedge extending south-west from the front of the adjacent No 19.
5. The council contends that the proposed development, by reason of its inappropriate form and massing, would not represent a high standard of design, as it would unbalance the appearance of the host dwelling. The addition would be awkwardly proportioned, would appear incongruous and would be out of keeping. There would be an adverse impact upon the character and appearance of the host dwelling and the surrounding street scene. The character of the Aston Conservation Area would be harmed, with the special interest of this heritage asset not preserved.
6. Policy DES4 of the Council's District Plan (DP) indicates that developments should respect or improve upon the character of the site and the surrounding area, in terms of its scale, height, massing, building materials (colour, texture), and design features.
7. Policy HOU11 of the DP indicates that extensions should be of a size, scale, design and materials that are appropriate to the character, appearance and setting of the existing dwelling and/or the surrounding area, and extensions should generally appear as a subservient addition to the dwelling. Moreover, roof dormers may be acceptable if appropriate to the design and character of the dwelling and its surroundings. Dormers should generally be of limited extent and modest proportions, so as not to dominate the existing roof form.
8. Policy HA4 of the DP notes that extensions and alterations to existing buildings in Conservation Areas will be permitted provided that they preserve or enhance the special interest, character and appearance of the area. Proposals will be expected to be of a scale, proportion, design and overall character that accords with and complements the surrounding area; and, in the case of alterations and extensions, be complementary and sympathetic to the parent building.
9. The proposed roof alterations are small in scale and do not extend beyond the height of the existing roof of the side extension. The materials to be used would generally match those in the existing dwelling in nature and/or colour, and this can, in any case be controlled by way of condition. There would be only a very small increase in the scale of the side elevation and, because of the topography and nearby roadside hedge, this would not be visible from any point other than immediately in front of the property at a close distance. On this basis, there would be no readily noticeable impact on the balance in the appearance of the host property in relation to neighbouring properties.
10. The Council contends that the roof alterations would be visible from a nearby footpath to the north-east. Due to planting at various points along the rear boundaries of the properties on Stringers Lane, and the distances involved, the development would not be readily visible. Moreover, its limited scale would mean that it would have no appreciable impact on the limited views available. Finally, the roof extension would, in any case, be partly screened by the main body of the host building itself.

11. In conclusion, I find that the proposed roof alterations to the side extension at No 17 would have no meaningful impact on views within, into or out of the CA. The alterations would be of a very limited, dormer-type extent and appearance, and would be subservient to the host dwelling. They would utilise materials of a generally sympathetic nature and/or colour and would not be harmful to the appearance of the host property or the street scene.
12. In the light of the above, I find that the proposed development would not be harmful to the character and appearance of the CA, and would therefore preserve that character and appearance. It would not conflict with Policies DES4, HOU11, HA1 and HA4 of the CA. I therefore allow this appeal.

Conditions

13. I have attached a condition relating to plans because it is necessary that the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans for the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning. I have attached a further condition relating to materials in the interests of the visual amenities of the area.

J D Westbrook

INSPECTOR