
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 July 2021

by Mrs H Nicholls FdA MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 31 July 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/K1128/D/21/3271219

2 Erme Bridge Cottages, Totnes Road to School Road, Ermington PL21 9NN

- 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 Tony Hopwood against the decision of South Hams District Council.
 - The application Ref 4244/20/HHO, dated 21 December 2020, was refused by notice dated 22 February 2021.
 - The development proposed is single storey rear extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host dwelling and whether or not it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Ermington Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal dwelling is a mid-terraced two storey cottage within Ermington Conservation Area (CA). Along with its adjoining neighbours, the terrace of three dwellings presents a coherent and pleasant elevational composition on the south-eastern edge of the CA. It is apparent that the elevations were previously the front of the dwellings, with the entrance doors still evident and slate-roof porch canopies having been added since. The three dwellings also have a regular window arrangement with consistent granite lintel features and upper windows sat almost directly beneath the eaves.
4. Due to the vernacular style of the dwellings and their general composition as a terrace of three with consistent features, particularly on their southern elevations, they make a positive contribution to the character and appearance, and thus, significance of the CA.
5. The proposal would involve the construction of an extension projecting perpendicularly from the southern elevation, rather than aligned to its oblique boundary fences. The extension would provide a dining and office, separate of the existing open plan living and kitchen space. The extension would involve the loss of the slate-covered, hipped roof porch and would involve the removal of the larger of the lower windows to provide a full-length door opening. There would be a small, glazed link section adjoining the building which would allow for the extension to have its own asymmetric hipped, zinc roof form.

6. The extension would extend almost the full width of the elevation, sitting marginally away from, and at an angle to the existing boundary fences on either side. Its southern elevation would also be one of two halves; it would have a glazed bi-fold door on one side and the other side would have an entrance door and wall section with glazing interspersed with timber louvres. Either side elevation of the section would be either fully timber clad or a mixture of glazing and timber.
7. Notwithstanding the contemporary approach to the design which attempts to create a lightweight addition, distinct from the original building fabric, the overall effect of the proposal would be to remove the historic features of interest of the dwelling itself that contribute to the composition of the terrace and its contribution to the wider CA. The features which are intended to draw reference from those that would be lost, i.e. the entrance door in substitution for the door and porch, would lack the richness and authenticity of the existing features and undermine the general coherence and degree of uniformity of the elevation presented by the terrace. Whilst it is suggested that the retained elements of the front elevation would remain visible, they would be dwarfed by the scale, degree of projection and bold components of the extension itself.
8. Whilst the current proposal has attempted to address issues raised in connection with previously dismissed appeals for similar extensions¹, I do not find that it takes sufficient account of the retention of the features of the existing cottage or their contribution to the coherence of the terrace. Similarly, extensions previously permitted to the dwellings on either side have been undertaken without disrupting the front building line and without obscuration of the existing positive features of the elevations. That the wider public views of the cottage and overall elevational composition of the terrace are now limited by the timber fences and established vegetated boundary does not affect my finding that the proposal would be harmful in views that are obtainable. Though it is alleged that inappropriate weight is being attributed to protection of the elevation given its enclosure, my view is that it is the main contribution of the dwelling to the CA and there is little scope to obscure much of it and alter it without harming the degree of contribution it makes.
9. In view of the above, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the dwelling and would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA, thus harming its significance. As such, the proposal would not accord with Section 72 of the Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act 1990, nor accord with Policies DEV20 and DEV21 of the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (2019).
10. Under the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) (2021), the harm would be 'less than substantial'. Paragraph 202 requires such harm to be balanced against the public benefits of the proposal.

Other Matters

11. Though I note that there would be no issue with the principle of an extension to the dwelling and no effects on amenities of neighbouring occupiers, these are neutral factors in the overall balance.

¹ Appeal references: APP/K1128/D/18/3215977 and APP/K1128/D/17/3178034

12. It has been advanced that the proposal would enable the appellant and other occupants of the dwelling sufficient space to work from home, which has become necessary following the COVID-19 Pandemic. Whilst I accept that an increase in living space to facilitate such is likely to be beneficial, it is difficult to encapsulate the suggested carbon benefits from doing so given that it requires the building of an additional extension and the permanence of such working arrangements are uncertain.
13. I also note that a certificate of lawfulness² has established that the siting of a structure falling within the definition of a caravan would be permitted development provided that it is positioned on a base within the garden and not attached to the southern elevation in any way. I note that this 'fallback' position would require the removal of the porch, which would be regrettable. However, I do not consider that the caravan structure proposed would have the same degree of permanence or lasting effect on the elevation of the dwelling as detailed in the current proposal.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

14. For the reasons outlined above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan, when considered as a whole. Whilst arguably there may be some public benefits from the construction phase economic input and from allowing the enlarged dwelling to accommodate a larger family, the main benefits would be personal to the appellant and other occupiers of the host dwelling. Such benefits are insufficient to outweigh the aforementioned harm to the designated heritage asset. Consequently, there are no other considerations of materiality, including the Framework or the fallback position, that indicate that the decision should be taken other than in accordance with the development plan.
15. The appeal is, therefore, dismissed.

Hollie Nicholls

INSPECTOR

² Permission reference: 0372/20/CLE dated 31 March 2020