

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 June 2021

by R C Shrimplin MA(Cantab) DipArch RIBA FRTPI FCI Arb MCIL

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 09 August 2021.

Appeal Reference: APP/H2265/D/20/3262408

'Bay Cottage', Maidstone Road, Wrotham Heath, Sevenoaks TN15 7SJ

- 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 M Earnshaw against the decision of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.
 - The application (reference TM/20/01258/FL, dated 17 June 2020) was refused by notice dated 11 August 2020.
 - The development proposed is described in the application form as follows: *"Addition of a second storey to an existing single storey side extension providing bedrooms and an ensuite for a growing family, extension of an existing family room at the rear to improve flow within the house and replace ageing windows/doors and structure".*
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary point

2. Notwithstanding the description of the application that was given in the application form, the nature of the proposal can more clearly be expressed as set out in the Council's notice of refusal and in the appeal form, as the addition of a second storey to an existing single storey side extension.

Main issue

3. The main issue to be determined in this appeal is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the host building and its surroundings.

Reasons

4. Wrotham Heath is a small settlement at the junction of the A20 and the A25. The A20 London Road is the more dominant, with fast moving traffic, but the A25 Maidstone Road is also a very busy through route. Development is concentrated along Maidstone Road (mainly on the southern frontage) and along the eastern frontage of Windmill Hill, where a ribbon of development extends southwards, away from the junction with Maidstone Road.
5. 'Bay Cottage' is located within a predominantly residential frontage on the south side of Maidstone Road but it faces the spacious highway junction with

- London Road, that is controlled by traffic lights. There is a variety of residential properties in the frontage but they are conventional in character, with pitched roofs and constructed of traditional materials, mainly brickwork.
6. 'Bay Cottage' itself has an arrangement of pitched roofs covering elements that are one or two storeys in height. The house has been extended over the years and the two-storey central portion has single-storey elements on each side, to the east and west respectively. There is an attractively laid out and secluded back garden, with various pieces of domestic equipment and a very modern outbuilding.
 7. At the front of the property, however, there is only a narrow area of garden between the house and the highway boundary, which is essentially taken up by a very high and dense conifer "hedge". At the time of the site visit, the conifers were showing some signs of distress but, at present, they almost entirely conceal the front of the house (apart from the eastern extension) from views along the highway.
 8. The single storey section that is attached to the west of the central part of the building has a roof that is finished with twin gables. It is now proposed that this roof should be removed and a second storey added to this part of 'Bay Cottage', in a different style.
 9. The 'National Planning Policy Framework' (NPPF) emphasises the aim of "achieving well designed places" in the broadest sense (notably at Section 12), while making effective use of land and encouraging economic activity. It is aimed at achieving good design standards generally, which includes providing good standards of accommodation. At the same time, of course, the NPPF acknowledges that modern design can have a role to play in creating a contemporary townscape. In respect of the design considerations that are relevant to this appeal, the very recent changes that have been made to the NPPF do not fundamentally alter the approach to be taken.
 10. An emphasis on the importance of good design is also to be found in the Development Plan, notably at Policy CP24 of the 'Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Local Development Framework Core Strategy' (which was adopted by the Council in September 2007). This points out the need for new buildings to "respect the site and its surroundings". Similarly, saved policy P4/12 from the Council's 'Compendium of Saved Policies' (dated April 2010), which is specifically concerned with extensions to residential properties, draws attention to the need to consider the form, scale, design and materials of proposed development in the context of the existing building and the wider streetscene.
 11. I am aware that 'Bay Cottage' is largely screened at present, by a high "green wall" of conifers. I am also conscious, however, that the trees are already well grown and that they could be removed. The finished house is likely to remain after the trees have gone and I have taken that into account in considering the proposed extension.
 12. The location at the junction of the A20 and the A25 is rather dominated by the highway infrastructure and passing traffic. Buildings in the vicinity, including 'Bay Cottage' itself, are undistinguished architecturally, but they are traditional in form and materials and they create a pleasant and harmonious streetscene.

13. The current proposals would provide a useful second floor area at 'Bay Cottage' providing additional bedrooms and a bathroom, with other improvements on the ground floor, including a single storey extension at the rear of the existing kitchen. The increase in the footprint would be limited, however, and the existing back garden would be little affected.
14. The proposed first floor extension would be very significant, however. Its architectural style would contrast sharply with the existing house, by adding a two-storey "box" structure with a flat roof to the existing traditional forms. The new structure would wrap over the old, in places, creating an awkward connection between the two, in addition to the incongruous juxtaposition of the new and old features. Moreover, the new flat-roofed volume would be significantly higher than the existing main eaves level and would compete with and impose itself upon the original. Thus, the finished building would be an amalgam of different forms that would conflict with each other architecturally.
15. In short, the resulting scheme would be awkward in the streetscene and would create an unattractive finished architectural composition that would be unsympathetic to the host building and would not respect the character of the streetscene and the wider surroundings. In consequence, it would conflict with both national and local planning policies that are aimed at achieving high standards of architectural design and I am convinced that it ought not to be allowed.
16. Evidently, the proposed development would make a useful addition to the existing house and would provide a better standard of accommodation for a growing family. Indeed, an alternative scheme may be acceptable, depending on the appearance and visual impact of the finished building. Nevertheless, I am convinced that, in this case, the harm that would be done to the character and appearance of the existing house and the surroundings outweigh the benefits of the project.
17. Hence, I have concluded that the scheme before me would conflict with both national and local planning policies (including the Development Plan) and that it ought not to be allowed. Although I have considered all the matters that have been raised in the representations, I have found nothing to cause me to alter my decision.

Roger C Shrimplin

INSPECTOR