
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 July 2021

by Les Greenwood MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 August 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/P1940/D/21/3273183

Wildwood, Loudwater Heights, Loudwater WD3 4AX

- 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 H Rupasinghe against the decision of Three Rivers District Council.
 - The application Ref 20/2393/FUL, dated 9 November 2020, was refused by notice dated 22 January 2021.
 - The development proposed is a part single storey part two storey rear extension, a first floor side extension above the existing garage, conversion of loft space to provide habitable space, roof alterations to include the raising of the ridge and insertion of a dormer window to the front elevation and dormer windows to the rear.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matter

2. A new version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 20 July 2021. Having considered the role and content of the Framework in relation to this case, I see no need to re-consult the main parties about this change in national policy.

Main issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the existing house and the Loudwater Estate Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The Council's 2013 Loudwater Estate Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) advises that the estate is characterised by a carefully laid out arrangement of dwellings, most with Arts and Crafts features in a variety of styles, designs and materials, set within generous plots in a sylvan, woodland setting. The CAA states that development should respect the scale and massing of surrounding buildings and should not be out of scale with the existing buildings typical of the conservation area. I note that the massing of the generally large houses in this area is broken down into distinct, smaller scale elements using features

such as projecting gables, hipped and cat-slide roofs and prominent dormer windows.

5. Loudwater Heights is a cul-de-sac on the edge of the conservation area, first built up in the 1950s following on from the interwar development of most of the estate. There are large houses here, set in large plots and including architectural elements typical of the conservation area, creating a well-mannered reflection of the older parts of the estate. Its inclusion within the designated conservation area indicates that there is heritage value in this later development, which shows an aspect of the evolution of local architecture and estate planning.
6. Over time, many of the houses on the estate have been extended substantially or even replaced. From what I could see on my site visit and in the submitted documents, these have by and large retained key features of the estate and in particular are articulated to retain traditional scales and massing.
7. Wildwood sits within a large plot, partly screened behind a high roadside hedge, but in a position where it is a focal point on the approach into the cul-de-sac. The house's front elevation, scale and proportions are in keeping with other houses on this street and in the conservation area as a whole. The side and rear elevations are modest and complementary. A low single storey garage wing to the side is a minor, subsidiary feature, with its height kept down by the use of a crown roof. The asymmetry of the overall composition is typical of the Arts and Crafts style.
8. The proposal would substantially reform the front elevation of the house, including the addition of a wide projecting gable, an increase to the height of the main roof forming a crown roof and the addition of 2 floors of accommodation over the garage wing to the side. The house would also be extended well to the rear at full height, nearly doubling the depth of the main house. The result would be a much more massive and imposing building which would greatly increase the house's presence in the street scene, particularly if the frontage hedge was ever to be reduced or lost. Although the individual architectural elements would be in character with the estate, the scale of the building would give it an overly commanding presence in this location.
9. Although the side elevations would not be readily visible from the street, they remain an important element of the building's architecture. Due to their combined depth, height and massing they would be significantly out of character with other properties in Loudwater Heights and the rest of the conservation area. Evidence has been submitted to show that crown roofs exist elsewhere on the estate. Their use should not be unacceptable in principle, but the problem here is that the use of the crown roof is part and parcel of the creation of out-sized side elevations. For not dissimilar reasons the largely unarticulated rear elevation as proposed would be overly bland and massive.
10. My attention has been drawn to the house next door, Mulberry House, which has been substantially extended under a 2011 planning permission including the introduction of a small area of crown roof. That development does share some aspects of scale and design with the current proposal, but the resulting building does not appear to be so deep or massive at the sides. In any case, I do not know the full circumstances of that approval and must judge this case on its own merits, in light of current circumstances. The extension of Mulberry

House has not significantly altered the overall architectural character of the cul-de-sac. I have furthermore reviewed the other cases and appeal decisions¹ that have been put forward by the appellant. All of these appear to be different in respect of the design concerns raised above.

11. I conclude that the proposal would overwhelm the scale, proportion and architectural character of the existing house, causing harm to the character and appearance of the house and the conservation area. It therefore conflicts with the shared aims of policies CP1 and CP12 of the Council's Core Strategy, policies DM1, DM3 and Appendix 2 of the Development Management Policies Local Development Document, the CAA and the Framework, to ensure that development is of a high standard of design that preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the conservation area.
12. In the Framework's terminology, this harm to a heritage asset would be '*less than substantial*', a phrase which covers a wide range of situations. Framework paragraph 200 states that any development causing harm to a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 202 states that development causing less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In this case, there are no clear public benefits that would outweigh the harm.
13. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

Les Greenwood

INSPECTOR

¹ APP/P1940/D/17/3179098; APP/P1940/D/16/3153068; APP/P1940/W/20/3244325; APP/P1940/D/13/2208437; APP/P1940/W/15/3022096