
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 November 2021

by R Bartlett PGDip URP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 November 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/D/21/3279900

315 Knightsfield, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7NJ

- 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 Owen Evans against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2021/1389/HOUSE, dated 16 March 2021, was refused by notice dated 9 July 2021.
 - The development proposed is solar panels installed to the front face of the house.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for solar panels installed to the front face of the house at 315 Knightsfield, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7NJ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 6/2021/1389/HOUSE, dated 16 March 2021, 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: CS01B, CS03B and location plan.

Preliminary Matter

2. Part 14, Class A of the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) grants planning permission for the installation of solar equipment on domestic premises, without the need to make a planning application, subject to certain criteria and conditions. The Local Planning Authority (LPA) has not referred to the GPDO or advised which, if any, of the criteria or conditions would not be met by the proposal. Based upon the evidence before me, it would appear that the proposal is permitted development. However, I have dealt with the appeal upon the basis that it has been submitted.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the dwelling and the surrounding area.

Reasons

4. 315 Knightsfield is an extended mid-20th century dwelling house constructed in buff coloured bricks and with a grey concrete pantile roof. It is surrounded by

- houses and a school of similar age and materials. The building is not of any special architectural or historic interest.
5. Solar panels are present on the front roof slope of nearby 305 Knightsfield and also on the side roof slope of 307 Knightsfield. They are not therefore uncommon in this area.
 6. 315 Knightsfield is set well back from both the road and from the building line of the dwellings to the south. When viewed from the north, the front roof slope of the house is screened by high trees along the boundary of 315 and 317 Knightsfield. Consequently the proposed solar panels would not be particularly prominent in the street scene and would only be visible from a small area, directly in front of and directly opposite the property.
 7. The “all black” solar panels proposed would be set in from the edges of the roof and would be raised less than 150mm above the existing surface. Like any alteration, they would change the appearance of the property. However, change is not the same as harm. Siting the panels on the rear roof slope of the dwelling would not be practicable in terms of maximising solar gain.
 8. Policy D1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 (the District Plan) requires all new development to be of high quality design. The supporting text to this policy expands upon this stating that sustainable development should be promoted. Good design encompasses more than just architecture. I have not been provided with a copy of policy R4 of the District Plan, which is referred to in the council’s decision notice, but based upon the reference to this in the officer report it states that planning permission will be granted for renewable energy sources provided they do not result in significant visual impacts. The council’s Supplementary Design Guide (SDG) includes a sustainability checklist for householder applications, which includes making the best use of the sun’s energy and using solar panels.
 9. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (paragraph 7). One of the key objectives, as set out in paragraph 8(c) is adapting to climate change. Paragraph 158 of the Framework, in relation to applications for renewable energy, states that LPA’s should recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions and should approve applications provided any impacts are or can be made acceptable.
 10. Even if the proposal did not benefit from deemed planning consent under the GPDO, the siting and scale of the panels would not result in any harm to the character and appearance of the dwelling or the surrounding area and would not therefore conflict with the planning policies and guidance that are most relevant. As there would be no adverse impacts, it is not necessary for me to balance these against the environmental benefits of this domestic renewable energy proposal in order to justify it.

Conclusion

11. The council has not suggested any conditions other than the standard time limit and accordance with the approved plans, which I have imposed for the avoidance of doubt.
12. For the reasons given above the appeal is allowed.

Rachael Bartlett

INSPECTOR