



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 February 2022

by A.Graham BA(hons) MAued IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 31st March 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/D/21/3279552

46 Blakemere Road, Welwyn Garden City AL8 7PJ

- 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 and Mrs Gavin Johnstone against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2021/0747/HOUSE, dated 7 March 2021, was refused by notice dated 4 May 2021.
 - The proposed development is for erection of first floor side extension, ground floor side extension, ground floor rear extensions, first floor rear extension to facilitate loft conversion, fenestration alterations and replacement chimney.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for erection of first floor side extension, ground floor side extension, ground floor rear extensions, first floor rear extension to facilitate loft conversion, fenestration alterations and replacement chimney as per Reference no 6/2021/0747/HOUSE dated 7 March 2021 subject to the conditions set out in the schedule below.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - a) The impact of the proposal upon the character and appearance of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area.
 - b) The effect of the proposal upon the living conditions of neighbours.

Procedural Matter

3. The appeal property was undergoing construction at the time of my site visit and this included large parts of the building being under scaffold and not visible. Despite this I am satisfied that I was able to view the areas subject to change under this application and assess them appropriately.

Reasons

4. Number 46 Blakemere Road is a red brick Arts and Crafts style house of the early twentieth century and forms a typical such design that characterised and defined much of Welwyn Garden City at the time. The property contains such vernacular inspired elements as steeply pitched roofs, simple gables, red brick and pantile materials along with modest and almost quirky elements such as half recessed dormer windows.

5. The property is within a street of similarly aged properties where both the Neo Georgian architectural elements so characteristic of the Garden City are infused with more traditional Arts and Crafts inspired vernacular devices such as those listed above. In light of this few properties are identical although there do appear to be similar types of houses used. I saw for instance that the street scene is largely symmetrical in front of the appeal site where two rows of houses give way to a set back in the street that contains number 46 and the house opposite, both of which appear architecturally similar with a conical pantile roof, central chimney and frontage gable.
6. This set back appears to break up the streetscene somewhat and allows the appeal property to be recessed within its plot behind beech type hedging. Due to this and due to previously approved side extensions I find it unlikely that the subject of the appeal would be visible from the front of the property.
7. To the rear of the property a large garden extends from a small decked area and is largely grassed and private due to a tall screen fence on either boundary. Due to the set back to the front elevation, neighbours at either side are set farther from the rear elevation but still appear to maintain a generous gap between houses due to their original generous siting.
8. The proposal before me seeks permission for the erection of a single storey rear extension so as to improve the ground floor living area. The proposal also seeks to infill a small area to the side of the property so as to make better use of the area around the house.
9. The extension would be built from an existing rear extension that previously extended to the rear and to the side of the house thereby creating a type of wrap around rear extension. In contrast this proposal would see a single extra extension of around 2.8m from the existing rear wall into the rear garden. This extension would be a flat roof modern design with bi folding doors and conical roof lights above. The smaller, infill extension to the side would be a small lean too infill with a window to the side.
10. The appeal site is located within the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area and as such, I am required by Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to give 'Special Attention' to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area. This is reflected in The National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework), which states that 'Great Weight' should be given to the heritage assets' conservation and also illustrates the positive contribution that heritage assets can make to the creation of sustainable and economically viable communities. Further to this Policies D1 and D2 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local District Plan 2005 also seek to ensure proposals are of a high quality design and preserve or enhance the context to which development is being proposed that are complimentary to the historic environment.
11. As discussed above I do not consider that the proposed extensions would be readily visible from the front of the property or the streetscene. Therefore I consider the main impact of the extensions would be confined to the side and rear and therefore the main impact upon the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area would be upon the changing aesthetics and footprint to the side and rear of house. I consider therefore that the location of this development represents a less sensitive location for development than if it were more towards the front of the property.

12. In terms of the design, scale and form of the proposed rear extension I find that, although of a more modern aesthetic, the character, appearance and sense of hierarchy between the main part of the house and the extension would not be harmed. On the contrary, in some ways I consider that the modern flat roof design contributes to enabling the different phases of extensions to be more fully understood which I consider would be beneficial in enabling changes to the original character to be recognisable.
13. In terms of the cumulative impact of the past and proposed extensions I consider that the plot is sufficiently large enough to accommodate such a quantum of development. I also consider that the efforts to achieve quality in terms of materials, as outlined within the Appellant's statement, would act as something of a Public Benefit weighing in favour of this proposal.
14. Subject to other materials being appropriate I therefore do not consider that the proposed rear extension would cause harm to the building. Similarly, although the proposed side infill extension would fill in an existing gap between the existing garage and utility room, I do not consider that this loss of such a modest space in itself would necessarily be harmful due to the enclosed and less sensitive nature of the proposed location.
15. In light of this I conclude that the proposed extensions would enable the building to evolve without causing harm to the building and as such I consider that the character and appearance of the Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area would be preserved and the requirements of Policies D1 and D2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 and Policy SADM15 of the emerging Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2016 have been met.

The effect of the proposal upon the living conditions of neighbours

16. As mention above the appeal property is set farther back than those of its neighbours and this not only gives articulation to the street scene but also results in the rear of the appeal property being set significantly back from the rear elevation of its neighbours. This is not harmful in itself but it does raise the possibility that extensions to the rear could impact more upon the living conditions of neighbours.
17. In this case the extension would increase the rear projection of the property by around 2.8m upon the existing rear extension that currently exists. The adjoining neighbour at number 44 is concerned that such an extension would result in further dominance and impact harmfully upon their living conditions especially with regards a rear study room.
18. In assessing the impact of this proposal, although I recognise a slight change in level between the two properties, I also acknowledge the orientation of the two houses with number 44 being located to the south of the appeal site. Therefore although the rear extension would result in a slightly higher structure, this would be some way removed from the rear elevation of number 44 and would not result in any adverse impact through the blocking of light to principal habitable rooms. Although the extension would result in a physical structure along the boundary here due to it only being marginally higher than the existing boundary fence and due to it being located to the north of the common boundary I do not consider that this would adversely harm the living conditions of neighbours.

Conditions

19. I have included all the policies suggested by the Council in their appeal statement as they all meet the tests as set out in the Planning Practice Guidance.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons above, taking into account all other matters raised, I allow the appeal subject to the conditions outlined below.

A Graham

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

1. The development hereby permitted must be begun before the expiry of three years from the date of this decision.
2. The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building.
3. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans: PGA031 Rev C and PGA032 Rev C both dated 16 February 2021.

End of Schedule