

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 March 2022

by Andrew Dale BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6TH April 2022

Appeal Ref. APP/W0530/D/22/3291764
38 High Street, Meldreth, Royston SG8 6JU

- 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 James Mossey against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application ref. 21/02914/HFUL, dated 22 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 8 December 2021.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as "*Extension and alterations to existing dwelling.*"
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the locality.

Reasons

3. The appeal property is a low, 3-bedroom, detached bungalow at the eastern end of a row of 3 similar single-storey properties (34, 36 and 38 High Street). These dwellings are set well back from the eastern side of High Street behind the grounds of no. 40 and are reached via a long private drive known as Woodlands Drive. They are positioned on a staggered alignment to that drive. The site lies on the eastern outskirts of Meldreth next to the railway line. The immediate surroundings are residential in character. There is an extant planning permission for a dwelling on land to the north (rear) of no. 38 and the plans submitted with this householder application show an access drive for that plot running adjacent to the boundary fence next to the railway line.
 4. The principle of extending the property and adapting it to meet the changing needs of the owners, including a desire for enhanced energy efficiency, are not at issue and I accept that householder extension schemes will inevitably make more efficient use of a site, thus moving towards optimising its potential. However, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) also advises that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development; so, development should add to the overall quality of the area and be visually attractive as a
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result of good architecture and sympathetic to local character. I consider that the appeal proposal is ill-judged in these important respects.

5. The locality is given a sense of place and a degree of local distinctiveness on account of the 3 bungalows being purposely planned for this backland area and based on single-storey unassuming designs and common characteristics in terms of height, shaping and materials. They are not prominent in views from High Street itself but when approaching the eastern end of Woodlands Drive, they are seen together as a visually obvious and distinct group.
6. Whilst the part 2-storey, part 1½-storey house which would result from the proposed new extension and alterations may broadly reflect the design approach and style of nos 30 and 32 across from Woodlands Drive and there are buildings of different height in this locality, it is the dwellings in the same low single-storey row as the appeal property which provide the relevant context in which the appeal site is experienced. Given the separation distance between the building at no. 38 and those at nos 30 and 32, the good coverage of tall trees and other vegetation, the different access drive used by those latter 2 dwellings and the lack of clear and direct views of nos 34-38 from High Street, any visual linkage between the appeal dwelling and nos 30 and 32 is exceedingly limited when viewing from High Street. Moreover, standing at the vehicular entrance to the appeal property and looking back the other way, it is very difficult to see both nos 30 and 32 given the intervening vegetation.
7. The project would considerably extend the height, width and depth of the existing bungalow and create a cross-shaped plan over 2 floors with a dominant 2-storey central projecting gable. The development would not be sufficiently subservient to the original building; rather it would be disproportionately larger than the host dwelling which would effectively lose its original identity.
8. Given its scale, size, siting, height and design, the lack of other similar abrupt changes in height within this row of bungalows and the coherence of the row of properties which the site forms part of, the proposed development, in adding considerable bulk and mass across the plot at a higher level, would appear incongruous and visibly at odds with the scale of the adjoining bungalows. That the resulting building would be seen to overwhelm those bungalows would be emphasized by the central 2-storey section of no. 38 having an eaves line only slightly below the roof ridge of no. 36 and projecting significantly forwards beyond the lower side wings. The white painted render finish would jar with the brickwork and infill timber cladding evident on the existing bungalows.
9. The proposed development would not frame the end of the row in a manner that would be compatible with the context and surroundings of the site. Instead, given the form and scale of the extension, the resulting building would appear discordant in views from the eastern end of Woodlands Drive and would negatively impact upon the character and appearance of the surroundings. My views would be the same if the dwelling that has been permitted on the land to the north of no. 38 were to be constructed. It would be substantially hidden by the proposed building on the appeal site and as part of a more restrained design, I see that all of the accommodation on its first floor would be lit by small roof lights.

10. I find on the main issue that the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the locality. The development would not enhance the area or be an example of high quality design as it would not be compatible with its location or appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, form, siting, design and materials in relation to the surrounding area. These outcomes point to a development that would not respect the objectives of Policies S/2 and HQ/1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan September 2018 or the Council's District Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document March 2010.
11. There would not be compliance with the key design themes in the Framework insofar as they relate to achieving well-designed places. The scheme may fulfil the social dimension of sustainable development as set out in the Framework by providing more useable living space for a family dwelling which would in turn support the broader sustainability of this popular village and offer a limited economic benefit to the building trade, but the environmental dimension, when looked at in the round, would not be fostered given the harm I have found under the main issue.

Conclusion

12. My finding on the main issue is decisive to the outcome of this appeal. There is conflict with the development plan. The harm cannot be mitigated by the imposition of planning conditions and it is not outweighed by other material considerations. For the reasons given above and taking into account all other matters raised and the representations that were submitted in response to the application from neighbouring residents and Meldreth Parish Council, I conclude that this appeal should not succeed.

Andrew Dale

INSPECTOR