

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 April 2022

by Andrew Dale BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13TH April 2022

Appeal Ref. APP/W4325/D/22/3292148

30 Withert Avenue, Wirral CH63 5NF

- 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 Mrs M Armstrong against the decision of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application ref. APP/21/01854, dated 16 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 15 November 2021.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as "*Dormer Loft Conversion & Two Storey Side Extension*".
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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 dwelling and the wider street scene.

Reasons

3. Nos 30 and 32 comprise a pair of 2-storey semi-detached houses with matching hipped end roofs and advanced 2-storey front bays. They are situated in an established residential area. Withert Avenue is straight and characterised by pairs of 2-storey semi-detached houses set back from the highway along consistent front building lines with regular spaces between the pairs.
 4. The appellant is proposing to enlarge the property with a 2-storey extension to the northern side elevation, with the hipped roof taken across to form a gable end. The loft would be converted. A flat-roofed dormer would be added over the existing and enlarged rear roof slope and 3 roof lights would be inserted in the front roof slope.
 5. The principle of extending the property is not at issue. However, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) 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 result of good architecture and sympathetic to local character. I consider that the appeal proposal is ill-judged in these important respects.
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6. Where extensions have been added to the side elevations hereabouts, they are of single-storey form. I have not been referred to any 2-storey or first floor side extensions along Withert Avenue and I did not see any on my site visit. This and the strong pattern of regular spaces between the dwellings point to the need for a sensitive design approach.
7. The 2-storey side extension would be set in from the northern side boundary of the plot by a distance of only about 0.8 m and be presented with a gabled roof without a lower ridge height and as a continuation of the front wall face at both ground and first floor levels. In these respects, the scheme's design eschews the criteria for setting back the first floor of a 2-storey side extension at Saved Policy HS11(viii) of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and the complementary guidance within the Council's House Extensions Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) which, when read together, are in place to avoid the terracing effect of such extensions, maintain a visual break and ensure the extension respects the character and scale of the original house.
8. The relevant criteria in the UDP apply to semi-detached houses of similar style. There is a mock Tudor projecting front gable feature above ground floor level at no. 28. Whilst this decorative feature adds interest to the front elevation, nos 28 and 30 are fundamentally the same style of house. I couldn't detect any material difference in the exterior colouring of nos 30 and 32.
9. My reading of the relevant policy and guidance is that if followed, they would permit both nos 28 and 30 to extend sideways in an acceptable manner. The appellant points out that no. 28 does not benefit from a 2-storey side extension so there would be no risk of a terracing effect. I understand the point the appellant is making, but it seems contrary to the intent of the policy and guidance and rather unfair to rely on no. 28 not extending to avoid the harmful full-blown terracing effect. Whilst each scheme should be considered on its own merits, the Council may find it difficult to resist an identical proposal at no. 28 if permission was granted for the appeal scheme. In any event, considering the appeal scheme on its own merits, the proposed side extension, given its design, would inevitably erode some of the existing visual gap between nos 28 and 30. Given the consistency of the gaps along Withert Avenue, this change would be noticeable, would detract from the street scene, rather than add to the overall quality of the area, and would conflict with the UDP and SPG.
10. Of greater concern is the fact that the side extension would dispense with the original hipped end thus markedly distorting the roof shape of the semi-detached pair (nos 30 and 32), especially as seen in public views from Withert Avenue. Whilst the scale of the extension would be appropriate to the size of the plot and would not dominate the existing building as such, this visibly evident loss of symmetry would be exacerbated by elongating the front elevation of the house without any break in the front wall plane or drop in the ridge height. The roof form and lines would not match or complement those of the existing building as required by Saved Policy HS11(iii) of the UDP. The SPG says that proposals to create gable end roofs on one side of pairs of semi-detached dwellings where both sides were originally hipped will not be allowed.
11. The appellant is correct to say that the vast majority of the dwellings along Withert Avenue have a gabled roof design. Still, falling towards the central part of the avenue, nos 30 and 32 and the directly opposing pair at nos 29 and 31

take on added significance as dwellings with matching hipped roofs. They make a positive contribution to the street scene at this point. I saw no other pairs of dwellings along Withert Avenue with mismatched roof styles. It seems to me that distorting one half of the roof to form a gable end would be a disappointing step, even though there are many gable-ended pairs of houses along the road.

12. The appellant refers to the existence of a completed 2-storey side extension (approved under appeal ref. APP/W4325/D/19/3227380) at 251 Teehey Lane which I looked at after my visit to the appeal property. I have also studied that appeal decision. This road is far removed from Withert Avenue and has a far more variable range of building designs. The Inspector in that case identified material differences in the roof designs and roof alignments between nos 251 and 253 and did not detect any unbalancing effects on the semi-detached pair of houses at nos 249 and 251. Importantly, that pair exhibit a balanced gabled roof form. This case is not directly comparable to the appeal case before me.
13. I realise that complying with the Council's policy and guidance on 2-storey side extensions and hip to gable roof designs may well restrict the internal layout desired by the appellant. However, there may be other less harmful ways in which to increase the habitable floor space of the property, so this matter does not lead me to a different conclusion about the appeal proposal before me.
14. The proposed development would result in an unsympathetic addition to the side of the existing dwelling which would detract from the character and setting of the existing building and the symmetry of the semi-detached pair of dwellings and create the potential for a visually damaging terracing effect. I find on the main issue that the proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the dwelling and the wider street scene, in conflict with the aims of UDP Saved Policy HS11 and the Council's SPG. There would also be a failure to adhere to the overarching design themes within the Framework insofar as they relate to achieving well-designed places.

Conclusion

15. 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, I conclude that this appeal should not succeed.

Andrew Dale

INSPECTOR