
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 May 2022

by Robin Buchanan BA (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23rd May 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/U2235/D/21/3286525

1 Wallett Court Cottages, Southernden Road, Headcorn, Kent TN27 9LN

- 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 Andrew Norman against the decision of Maidstone Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/504437/FUL, dated 10 August 2021, was refused by notice dated 29 October 2021.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing outbuildings and pergola, erection of a two storey side and rear extension.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the appeal property and the area, including the Low Weald Landscape of Local Value (the LWL).

Reasons

3. The appeal property is a semi-detached cottage with a main L shaped two-storey floorplan. It steps down to single-storey at the rear and there is a narrow, lower two-storey side extension. These distinguishing features, including a front elevation with white painted brick, red/brown roof tiles, ornate gable upper windows and a similar side extension are broadly reflected in the other half of this pair of cottages. The appeal site is at the end of a short frontage of residential development along one side of Southernden Road, in the countryside. The surrounding fields are interspersed by a similar scattered, isolated pattern of groups of buildings. It is an expansive, mainly flat, remote rural area with some extensive views across the countryside. The appeal property is locally distinctive for these reasons, including as part of the LWL.
4. The proposed extension would be within the domestic curtilage of the appeal property, sited behind the side extension. External materials and some design details such as fenestration, roof pitch and eaves level would match the appeal property.
5. However, the floorplan and elevation dimensions would be approximately the same as the main, front part of the appeal property. The appellant does not dispute the Council's estimate of building volume for the proposal or cumulatively taken with previous extensions. Over two storeys, and with a ridge that was only marginally lower than this part of the appeal property there

- would be a substantial increase in the scale and massing of built form. It would not, therefore, result in a modest or limited addition to the appeal property.
6. Despite its siting and set back, the extension would overlap beyond the end of the side extension by a significant distance. While the ridge would project above the side extension by a relatively small distance, it would run across the entire width of the side extension at this high level and onwards to the end of the proposed extension. This would reveal a significant proportion of sloping roof and blank two-storey front elevation below. Consequently, not only would the proposed extension dominate the existing side extension, but it would also not be visually subservient in relation to the main part of the appeal property. Moreover, the excessive width and height would unduly erode the symmetry and balance between the front elevations of the appeal property and the adjoining cottage.
 7. The very limited degree of connection of the proposed extension to the main two-storey part of the appeal property (by a corner point) would result in a significant degree of detachment. It would jut out by an inordinate degree and give the impression of almost two separate parts to the resulting dwelling, particularly from the side and rear. This would be at odds with the basic L shaped arrangement of the appeal property, maintained by the size and siting of the existing side extension. This disjointed arrangement of built form and roofs, and the overall size of the extension, would give the impression almost of a separate dwelling.
 8. The proposal would not significantly enlarge the group of buildings comprising this pair of semi-detached cottages or in this frontage. It would, nonetheless, result in a substantially greater built-up feel in a prominent part of the plot and an appreciable commensurate reduction in openness. While in some views the proposal would be observed against the back-drop of the appeal property, overall, its two-storey form would be conspicuous above existing landscape features. As a result, it would be obtrusive in public views from within the LWL along Southernden Road and Grigg Lane to the south and the public footpaths that I have been referred to.
 9. The structures to be demolished have an appreciable combined footprint but are not permanent in construction or materials and two are not attached to the appeal property. While removal would alleviate their visual presence and consolidate the footprint of built form at the appeal site, the loss of these single-storey structures would not off-set the adverse impacts of the taller and bulkier proposed two-storey extension.
 10. I have also been referred to previous enlargement of the adjoining cottage. However, aside from its comparable side extension, in siting, design or size the other extensions and the large, detached outbuilding, are not the same as the proposed development in this appeal. Moreover, those additions have mostly been executed in a coherent and integrated fashion which maintains important features and the overall appearance and integrity of that cottage, including in relation to the appeal property. This reinforces the existing pattern of development and maintains local character in a positive way in the LWL.
 11. Taking all of the above into account, I find that the development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the appeal property and the area, including the LWL. Consequently, it would not comply with Policies SP17, DM1, DM30 and DM32 of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2017. These policies

include that development in the countryside should conserve and enhance the LWL, be high quality in design and respond positively to the character of the area and local distinctiveness having regard to siting, scale, height, mass and bulk. In addition, extensions should be sympathetically related to an existing dwelling without overwhelming or destroying its original form and be acceptable in the countryside. Nor would it comply with the Council's Residential Extensions supplementary planning document 2009. In particular, section 5 'extensions within the countryside' — design principles, scale, form and siting.

12. It would also be at odds with objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which seek to achieve well-designed places (paragraphs 130 a), b), c) and d)), protect and enhance valued landscapes and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside (paragraphs 174 a) and b)). It also states that development that is not well-designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies (paragraph 134).

Other Matters

13. The Council's decision was a surprise to the appellant but its handling of the planning application is not relevant to my decision. A lack of public objection to the proposal (including at appeal stage) does not mean the absence of material planning harm. There is no barrier in principle to additional living space at the appeal property and I sympathise with the appellant's reasons for the scheme before me. Nevertheless, these would be private benefits of the proposal and the development would remain long after these personal circumstances have ceased to be material. Accordingly, I give little weight to these considerations.
14. The proposal would not have an adverse effect on the living conditions of the occupiers of the adjoining cottage and be acceptable in relation to parking, ecology and trees. The absence of harm in these respects, and compliance with the Council's development plan and the Framework, are neutral factors in my decision.
15. These other matters do not, therefore, overcome the harm that I have found in the main issue above which I give substantial weight. I have considered the appeal and this particular proposal on its individual planning merits.

Conclusion

16. The proposal would not accord with the development plan overall. There are no other material considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which outweigh this finding.
17. Therefore, for the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

Robin Buchanan

INSPECTOR