
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 September 2022

by R C Shrimplin MA(Cantab) DipArch RIBA FRTPI FCI Arb MCIL

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 November 2022

Appeal Reference: APP/Z1510/W/22/3300963

Land at Maltings House, Sturmer Road, Steeple Bumpstead CB9 7BS

- 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 D Gale against the decision of Braintree District Council.
 - The application (reference 21/03607/FUL, dated 10 December 2021) was refused by notice dated 10 February 2022.
 - The development proposed is described in the application form as follows: *"Demolition of dwelling and outbuildings and construction of a replacement dwelling and cart lodge (re-submission of 19/01195/FUL)"*.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue to be determined in this appeal is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surroundings.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located in the countryside, to the north-east of Steeple Bumpstead and some way to the south of Haverhill. The landscape is predominantly agricultural in character, with a scatter of buildings along the country lanes. The site itself is to be found at a three-way junction, where a small group of buildings has developed around the junction. The sites in this cluster appear to be predominantly residential in character but are by no means exclusively so.
4. The land which is now proposed to be redeveloped had been substantially cleared by the time of the site visit. It is now somewhat overgrown, with some debris and other material on the site. It is clear, however, that a house stood on the site until recently. The land is approximately level, with some heaped material in places and with some established trees and shrubs that contribute to the rural setting. It has been explained that various outbuildings that previously existed on the site have been demolished, as has the original house.

5. Planning permission has previously been granted for the construction of a new house on the land; indeed, it is pointed out that there are two extant planning permissions for such development projects.
6. Nevertheless, an alternative scheme for a replacement house on the site is now proposed.
7. The 'National Planning Policy Framework' emphasises the aim of promoting sustainable development and it acknowledges the importance of the natural and local environment, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, among other things. It also has the more general aim of "achieving well designed places" in the broadest sense (notably at Section 12), while making effective use of land and encouraging economic activity.
8. Policy CS5 of the Council's 'Core Strategy' (which was adopted in September 2011) was intended to protect the countryside, with particular reference to village envelopes and other settlement boundaries. This approach has been carried forward in the new 'Braintree District Local Plan 2013-2033', which was adopted (in two 'Parts') in 2021 and 2022. In the new Development Plan, Policy LPP1 again seeks to direct new development to existing settlements, while Policy LPP37 is specifically relevant to the construction of replacement dwellings in the countryside. Planning policies continue to emphasise the importance of high-quality design.
9. One of the earlier permitted schemes includes a number of gables in a more complex design that seems to me to be well suited to the rural setting. By contrast, the second has a hipped roof and is generally plainer, designed with a more horizontal emphasis. The hipped roof is awkward, the pitch of the hips being markedly different from the main roof slopes, and the overall effect is plainer and less harmonious, in my opinion.
10. The new house, as currently proposed, would be set further back from the road than the dwelling that previously stood on the site and it could be well screened. Moreover, the removal of the outbuildings that previously stood on the site has been clearly beneficial in terms of the character and appearance of the rural area, from the evidence that has been presented. These are evidently factors that weigh in favour of the appeal.
11. On the other hand, the new proposal would result in a larger and visually more imposing building than either of those that were previously approved. It would have some of the characteristics of the second of the two earlier schemes (notably the dominant hipped roof) but with some significant stylistic differences. In particular, the exterior walls of the building would be finished with vertical cedar boarding and the elevational treatment adopts a more random fenestration pattern. The forward projecting part of the scheme would be glazed with a large composite window, two storeys in height.
12. It has been argued that the new design would be compatible and in harmony with its surroundings and that it would have an overall appearance that would be similar to a "timber barn". I am not convinced that this would be so, however. In my view, the design would have a rather modern appearance and would appear bulky and insistent on its plot. The roof construction and the two-storey front window would be awkward in appearance. I accept that a well designed modern building could be an asset to the locality but the current

proposal would be somewhat clumsy and would be larger than the earlier designs.

13. I note that the new dwelling would be further back on its site than its predecessors, although it would not be wholly screened from public view. Nevertheless, it is plain that a new building would inevitably have some impact on the character and appearance of the surroundings, while a more forward siting might even have reflected historic building patterns in the countryside. I have formed the opinion, therefore, that the critical consideration in this case relates to the bulk of the proposed building and the quality of the design.
14. In this appeal, I am convinced that the proposed new house would be overly prominent in its location and that the design would be incongruous and unsatisfactory, with an ungainly and dominant roof structure and an intrusive forward projecting window element. In the broadest sense, the project does not achieve the high standards of design and appearance that local and national planning policies aspire to.
15. It is acknowledged that the principle of redevelopment of this site has been established by the previous grants of planning permission and that the extant permissions amount to very important material considerations in this case. Moreover, the improvement to the appearance of the site and the creation of a useful new dwelling in place of the previous house weigh in support of the project.
16. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the harm that would be done to the character and appearance of the surroundings outweighs the benefits of the project, notwithstanding the history of the site and the "fallback" position. The proposal needs to be considered on its own merits, bearing in mind the existence of viable alternative designs for the site, and I am convinced that the objections to this scheme significantly and demonstrably outweigh its limited potential benefits.
17. Hence, I have concluded that the scheme before me would conflict with both national and local planning policies (including the Development Plan) and that it ought not to be allowed. Although I have considered all the matters that have been raised in the representations, I have found nothing to cause me to alter my decision.

Roger C. Shrimplin

INSPECTOR