



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 January 2023

by Eleni Randle BSc (hons) MSc FRICS FAAV MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 02 February 2023.

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/D/22/3309493

3 Soham Close, Wokingham, Earley, RG6 4JD

- 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 Ms Maria Norville against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 221226 dated 15 April 2022, was refused by notice dated 29 July 2022.
 - The development proposed is single storey side extension, first floor extension above garage and two storey front extension. Conversion of integrated garage to habitable accommodation and new 6ft fence to west boundary. Existing side extension was built in error believing it to be permitted development.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. I have utilised the Council's description of the development as per the decision notice as I feel it more concisely describes the development overall.
3. The appellant states the conversion of the garage was granted permission in 2017, however, I have no evidence of this before given that application ref: 172627 (listed in the planning history of the Council's report), which includes reference to conversion of existing garage to habitable accommodation, is stated to have been refused. In any case the refusal reason is not based upon any objection to any existing or proposed conversion of the existing garage so is not at the heart of the main issue within this appeal.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the impact of the proposal upon the street scene, character of the area and host plot.

Reasons

5. The appeal site is a part single, part two storey, detached dwelling located at the end of a cul-de-sac. At the time of my site visit I noted that whilst the properties have some variation in basic style and presentation they are generally similar in terms of building type, scale and overall level of development of individual plots relative to the total of ten dwellings within the cul-de-sac. The appeal site is currently two storey with a single storey garage to the side and is noted not to have been built perpendicular to the boundary. Overall the appeal site is a modest plot in an urban setting.

6. When approaching the appeal site, and viewing from near no. 1 Soham Close, the building line is slightly staggered with the appeal site being forward of no. 1 and no. 2 Soham Close. This is demonstrated on both the plans as well as the labelled photographic imagery submitted by the appellant who is noted not to be a developer. There are several elements to the appeal proposal, one of which includes a proposed two storey front extension. This element of the proposal would bring two storey development forward, just short of the front building line of the existing garage, which would be most notable at first floor level within the street scene as it would be forward of the overall building line.
7. I note the appellant's comments regarding creation of a room which is not a box room above the porch, as a result of the two-storey front extension, but this form of development would be uncharacteristic within the street scene of Soham Close itself which is the main consideration as that is the immediate context within which the proposal would be viewed and not within the context of proposals referenced in Chatteris Way which are visually disconnected from the visually well contained cul-de-sac of Soham Close.
8. To the left of the dwelling (north east) the extension proposed over the existing garage is both set down from the main ridge as well as set back from the front elevation. I find this element would be acceptable in isolation and indeed I note there are examples of similar extensions over garages within the cul-de-sac. Similarly I find that, in isolation, a ground floor front extension would likely be acceptable and would be consistent with other features characteristic within the cul-de-sac such as that at no. 6. Despite this, to the right of the dwelling (north west) the proposed first floor side elevation would result in a staggered ridge line which I find appear awkward, combined with the narrow nature of this extension, as an addition to the host dwelling.
9. The combination of proposals would result in three differing ridge heights and would be visually awkward as a result of multiple extensions. There would be notable additional width at first floor level as a result of extension to both sides resulting in virtually all of the width of the plot being occupied by two-storey built form. I find that whilst the appeal site is an end plot with one neighbour, not a corner plot, this level of built form would be uncharacteristic for the immediate area where the dwellings, and overall built form, are broken up with some spacing maintained at first floor level within respective plots.
10. Whilst I find that views through, and beyond, the property were limited of the adjacent trees themselves as noted by the Council I still find that such general gaps remain important in terms of visual amenity as a result of their contribution to an open feel versus what would be present as a result of the proposals in terms of a more solid row of development visually. Such gaps, in this case, break up the built form within the street scene at first floor level and contribute to the quality of the area. The efficient use of land is, evidently, encouraged at both national and local level in terms of planning policy but this is not to the detriment of appropriate design with regard to the host dwelling and character of the area and the street scene.
11. I note that the appellant has submitted photographs of other dwellings as part of the appeal, however, no further evidence or information has been submitted such as plans or permissions for the extensions highlighted. Despite this I note that no. 6 was, from the Council's report, granted a single storey front extension and no. 1 has a single storey side extension. Whilst each case must

be considered on its own merits, based upon the evidence before me and my site visit I do not find that the extensions at no. 6 or no. 1, nor those referenced within the appellant's submissions, are comparable to the cumulative impact of the combined proposals which are before me within this appeal.

12. Whilst certain elements may be acceptable in isolation, as seen on other examples noted by the appellant, they have not resulted in the same impacts which I have identified as key issues within this appeal as a result of combination of multiple extensions. None of the dwellings on Soham Close have been granted permission for such a notable increase in bulk at first floor level as is proposed at no. 3. I note that the appellant states that other proposals were not subject to the same level of scrutiny as the appeal proposal, however, I have no evidence or information as to the assessment of the proposals which would have been considered on their own merits against the relevant Local Plan at the point of determination.
13. Extensions do not have to be uniform, or the same size, but their impact (in this case cumulatively) is a valid consideration with regard to the main issues. A lack of detailing on plans, which should be representative of the proposal as a basis for both decision making as well as being (if approved) the basis for which a development is defined and therefore controlled, is of relevance. Detailing of developments is an important consideration as to the visual impact of the proposal with regard to the host dwelling as well as the character, and appearance, of the surroundings. In this case a lack of feature or detail to the proposed two-storey front elevation would negatively contrast with the street scene in which most properties benefit from characteristic detailing.
14. Reference is made to 2 Waring Close with inclusion of a photograph. No evidence such as plans, planning permission, proximity to the appeal site (other than reference to being the opposite edge of the field) for example are submitted to enable me to assess its relevance to the appeal proposal. An end, or corner, plot is not entitled to stand out or become a landmark it still falls to be assessed in the same manner as all proposals during the application period, against the Local Plan policies and relevant guidance.
15. Cumulatively, the proposals would consume the host dwelling and represent over development of the plot as a result of proposals to extend the host dwelling to both side and the front which would be both excessive in scale and bulky. I note the appeal is made as a result of the change in the stages of the lives of the occupants of the appeal site and their differing needs for internal space, however, the personal requirements of the appellant do not overcome the harm I have found with the proposals as outlined within this decision letter.
16. The proposal would be contrary to Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2010 (CS) Policy CP1 which seeks to maintain and enhance the high quality of the environment and CS Policy CP3 which seeks to ensure that proposals are of an appropriate mass, built form and character appropriate to the area.
17. The proposal would also be contrary to the guidance contained within the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document which requires that any alteration and extension to an existing building should be well-designed, respond positively to the original building, contribute positively to the local character and street scene, and relate well to the neighbouring properties and,

within regard to front extensions, also advises that they are generally only acceptable where the building is set further back from the street than the prevailing building line and should not be more than one storey in height.

Other Matters

18. The Council cite Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 Policy CC03 in the refusal reason, however, a copy of this policy is not before me.
19. It is noted that the Town Council are concerned that the proposal may not be within the applicant's ownership, however, landownership is a private matter had the proposal been acceptable in other regards. I have no evidence to conclude differently on these matters. The appellant notes ongoing matters to be resolved with regard to a shed – these do not form part of the appeal proposal before me and are outside the scope of this appeal.
20. The appellant outlines matters relating to parking. Whilst the Council's comments, within their delegated report, are noted parking does not specifically feature as a refusal reason so has not been a main issue for consideration. Despite this I find that at the point of my site visit the lawn in question looked in reasonable health. Parking solutions, such as reinforced grass, could have been explored further but this would only deal with materials and not the resultant car parking itself which would then dominate the property frontage which would further support overdevelopment of the plot in question.
21. The Council raise no issue with regard to loss of light, overbearingness or residential amenity. Handling of an application, as far as whether pre-application advice was sought or not, is procedural matter which is not within the scope of this appeal and indeed the pre-application advice commentary on the decision notice is an informative and not a reason for refusal. The decision was made by a Council planning officer which would be signed off by a planning manager, in this case, through the Council's scheme of delegated powers which is normal practice for applications which have no reason to go through a planning committee.

Conclusion

22. For the reasons outlined above, and taking account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Eleni Randle

INSPECTOR