



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 March 2023

by G Ellis BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20th April 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/D/23/3315972

Firbank Cottage, Guildown Road, Guildford GU2 4EW

- 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 Mary Margetson against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 22/P/01158, dated 1 July 2022, was refused by notice dated 15 November 2022.
 - The development proposed is the erection of extensions and alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Guildford Borough Council adopted the Guildford Borough Local Plan: Development Management Policies (LPDMP) on 22 March 2023. As a result, policies G5, H8, HE7 and HE10 of the Guildford Local Plan 2003 cited in the decision notice have now been superseded by LPDMP policies D4, H4, D18 and D20, respectively. Both main parties have had the opportunity to comment on any relevant implications for the appeal and I have had regard to the LPDMP in reaching my decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the host property and the surrounding area, including the St Catherine's Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The appeal property is part of a large, detached 19th Century building which has been subdivided into two properties. Firbank Cottage is formed of the front section with two, gabled two-storey elements and a single-storey section to the side, an extension added in the 1990s. Firbank is however the larger part of the original building with elevated views towards the south and has a large ornamental porch entrance on the west elevation.
5. The building is located at the point where the alignment of Guildown Road changes. As a result, it has a larger frontage, although, it effectively aligns with the properties to the west, which are set behind a boundary wall which extends some distance along Guildown Road and curves around Firbank/Firbank Cottage.

6. The architecture of the large individual properties and the boundary walls contribute to the character of the area and the significance of the St Catherine's Conservation Area (SCCA). In accordance with Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 special attention is to be had to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of a Conservation Area.
7. The building of Firbank Cottage/Firbank makes a positive contribution to the SCCA and the St Catherine's Conservation Area Appraisal explains that it was one of the earliest developments of spacious residential plots along Guildown Road. I agree with the appellant's view that the heritage value is primarily derived from the building as a whole. Nonetheless, the extension should also be considered in relation to its host property, Firbank Cottage, and any impacts of the subdivision.
8. The Council's Residential Extensions and Alterations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) explains that extensions should respect the proportions of the existing dwelling, should generally be subservient and indicates that there is a general presumption against extensions to the front of a property.
9. Firbank Cottage has a subservience to Firbank both in terms of scale and floor area. The appeal proposal would add a two-storey extension to the north elevation extending one of the gable projections and adding an additional single-storey element attached to the existing extension. The proposed height of the two-storey extension follows that of the existing cottage and the depth is more or less doubled. This would be, together with the existing extension, a substantial and disproportionate increase from the original size of Firbank Cottage.
10. The hierarchical relationship between the two properties/parts of the building is part of its character and would be significantly reduced. The northern section (Firbank Cottage) would be increased to a point where these proportions and the subservience are diminished, and the extensions add a busyness to the north and side elevations.
11. Fronting Guildown Road the extensions would alter the appearance of the building to the road. The distinctive material characteristics: red brick with diaper work in blue brick, stone quoins and window dressings of the building are specifically highlighted in the SCAA Appraisal. While I understand the Council's concerns regarding the replication of the brickwork, the appellant proposes to reuse materials and heritage material specialists to undertake the work, and such matters could be conditioned. Nevertheless, the extensions would in part cover the original building and there would undoubtedly be some distinctions between the original and the extensions. Furthermore, due to the forward position, the new development would be the dominant element.
12. Vegetation along the boundary with Guildown Road provides screening however, parts of the building are visible, in particular, the gabled section to Firbank Cottage which is to be extended. This is seen along the driveway and from Guildown Road looking towards the site from the west, and with the added depth of the projection it would be visually more prominent.
13. I acknowledge that the proposal has been designed to reflect and respond to the existing building and, as such, in design terms, I do not find the extensions would be incongruous. However, the scale and form would be disproportionate

to the existing dwelling and would be visually intrusive to the detriment of the character and appearance of the building as a whole and its relationship with the streetscene and the SCCA.

14. The harm to the significance of the SCCA would be less than substantial and consequently, in accordance with Paragraph 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), this harm is to be weighed against the public benefits. Whilst the appellant indicates that the proposal provides necessary renovation and better energy efficiency there are no specific details before me and there is nothing to suggest that the work to the property is needed other than to increase the size of the accommodation which is a private benefit accruing to the appellant. As required by paragraph 199 of the Framework great weight should be given to an asset's conservation, irrespective of the level of harm. In the absence of any public benefits to outweigh the harm, I conclude that the extension would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the SCCA.
15. The development would thereby conflict with LPDMP Policies D18 and D20 and Policy D3 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan: strategy and sites 2019 (LPSS) which aims to preserve or enhance the special character of Conservation Areas and the historical environment. There would also be conflict with LPDMP Policies D4 and H4, LPSS Policy D1 and the SPD guidance which require high-quality design that contributes to the local distinctiveness and for extensions to take into account the existing context, scale, character and proportions of the existing dwelling.

Other Matters

16. The Council have assessed the proposal as not adversely impacting on the living conditions of the occupiers of Firbank, and I have no reason to disagree with that assessment. However, the lack of harm in this respect and compliance with the relevant policies does not alter my findings on the main issues.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons set out and having regard to all other matters raised the appeal is dismissed.

G Ellis

INSPECTOR