



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 March 2023

by Robert Fallon B.Sc. (Hons) PGDipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11th May 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/K0425/D/22/3304707

Windermere, Chinnor Road, Bledlow Ridge, Buckinghamshire, HP14 4AA

- 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 Robert Mitchell against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council.
 - The application Ref 22/05899/FUL dated 1 April 2022, was refused by notice dated 14 June 2022.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as "A two-storey front extension, gable alterations including replacement of existing hip roof with 2no. gable ends, new dormer windows to front and rear, replacement rooflights to rear and relocation of small shed to front."
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the existing dwelling and wider area.

Reasons

Appeal site context

3. The appeal site contains a modern detached chalet bungalow set on a spacious plot enclosed by timber fencing, mature trees and hedging. The property is finished in an attractive red brick with a fully hipped dark brown plain tile roof and fronts onto a short narrow lane called 'The City', with its side elevation facing Chinnor Road.
4. The wider area is characterised by detached dwellings of varying architectural styles, maturity, scale and height (single, 1.5 and 2-storey), set on large plots with substantial tree and hedgerow coverage. Overall, I found the area to have a verdant, loose-knit and attractive rural character.
5. The appeal site falls within the Bledlow Ridge Settlement Boundary, Green Belt and Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Character and appearance

6. When viewed against the limited height of the main roof and smaller ground floor front elevation windows, the proposed dormer windows would appear

- disproportionately large and out of character. Such a composition would also run counter to the well-established architectural tradition of dormer windows being smaller than the primary windows in the main wall plate below them.
7. The above harm would be compounded by the proposed 2-storey front extension, which has been designed with a much higher eaves line than that on the existing building. As a consequence, it would have a bulky appearance and dominate the front elevation of the property.
 8. In light of the above, and when considered collectively, the proposed 3 front elevation dormer windows and 2-storey front extension would create the impression of a crowded roof space and give the building an unattractive top heavy appearance.
 9. Although I found the area to be characterised by a mixture of hip and gable roofs, I recognise that Policy 5 of the Neighbourhood Plan¹ seeks to avoid the use of hipped roofs on new development and that the existing dwelling therefore conflicts with this objective. However, one of the proposed gable ends in the scheme before me would introduce an atypical section of flat roof where a traditional ridgeline should be, which would be unsightly and incongruous with the existing dwelling and surrounding area.
 10. The scheme would also introduce additional facing materials to the exterior of the building (grey aluminium glazing, timber cladding at first floor level and leadwork to the dormers), with the result being a multitude of different finishes and colours that would further erode its simple form and appearance.
 11. In general, I consider the proposed dormers and 2-storey front extension lack coherence with the ground floor of the property and other building forms found in the local area. The development would as a consequence neither result in a faithful adherence to traditional precedents or a totally convincing contemporary design.
 12. The appellant has drawn my attention to a number of other properties in the area (both existing and under construction), which they consider to be more prominent in the street scene and have similar characteristics to the 2-storey front extension and dormers now proposed. However, I found none to be directly comparable to the scheme before me in terms of detailed design, fenestration, articulation, scale, form and dormer window proportion.
 13. In support of the scheme, the appellant also states that the existing property is unsympathetic to its surroundings and provides little architectural merit to the area, with an uncharacteristic decorative front entrance and multiple rooflights. Whilst I agree that its design is unremarkable, with a front door that is not typical of the locale, I nonetheless found its overall composition to be discreet, unassuming and innocuous. As a consequence, whilst it does not make a positive contribution to the character of the area, neither does it give rise to a harmful impact, as the scheme before me would.
 14. The appellant further states that the ground floor of the dwelling would not be easily seen from the public realm because of existing landscaping and its setback. However, the upper part of the 2-storey front extension, main roof and new dormers would be, which would intensify the harmful impact described above. In any event, screening can only mitigate negative impacts, rather than

¹ Bledlow-cum-Saunderton Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2033, June 2017.

remove impacts or provide enhancement and ought never to be regarded as a substitute for well-designed development, particularly as there is no certainty that it will be retained in perpetuity.

15. The appellant also states that the scheme's 2-storey front extension would replicate the original dwelling that stood on the site before the current property was constructed. However, that building no longer exists and I must therefore consider the appeal scheme on its own merits. I also note that the appellant has attempted to address the Council's concerns in respect of a previously withdrawn scheme. However, this does not alter the context of the current appeal or lead me to form a different conclusion.
16. In view of the above, I conclude that the development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the existing dwelling and wider area. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policies CP9, DM30, DM35 and DM36 of the Local Plan² and Policy 6 of the Neighbourhood Plan, which collectively seek, amongst other things, to ensure that development; - (a) is of a high quality design that respects the character and appearance of the existing property and surrounding area; (b) does not overwhelm the original dwelling; and (c) respects the built heritage of the Chilterns AONB and enhances the sense of place and local character
17. I also find the scheme does not accord with the design principles and objectives of the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide³ and Council Householder Design Guide⁴, which collectively seek, amongst other things, to ensure that dormers are kept low and as small as possible, to minimise their impact upon the shape of the roof. Further conflict arises with the latter document which states that front extensions should normally be of a subservient scale that does not dominate the building.
18. I also conclude that the scheme conflicts with Paragraphs 126 and 130 of the Framework⁵, which collectively seek, amongst other things: (a) the creation of high quality, beautiful buildings; (b) development that is visually attractive as a result of good architecture; (c) development that is sympathetic to local character; and (d) schemes that maintain a strong sense of place. In reaching a decision, I have also given significant weight to Paragraph 134 which states that development which is not well-designed should be refused.

Planning balance

19. The Local Plan was adopted within the last 5 years and the Neighbourhood Plan made not long before this in June 2017. I am satisfied that the policies referred to are broadly consistent with the Framework and that the proposal conflicts with the development plan when taken as a whole.
20. I recognise that the scheme would result in benefits from;- (a) improved internal living conditions; and (b) local employment during construction. However, I consider these benefits to be of limited value and that the adverse impacts of the scheme would outweigh these, when assessed against the policies in the development plan and other material considerations.

² Wycombe District Local Plan, Adopted August 2019, Wycombe District Council.

³ Chilterns Buildings Design Guide, The Chilterns Conservation Board, Published February 2010.

⁴ Householder Planning and Design Supplementary Planning Document, Wycombe District Council, Adopted January 2020.

⁵ National Planning Policy Framework, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 20 July 2021.

21. In view of the above, I conclude that the proposal does not accord with the development plan and that other material considerations do not indicate that the proposal should be determined other than in accordance with this.

Conclusion

22. All representations have been taken into account, but no matters, including the benefits of the development and the scope of possible planning conditions, have been found to outweigh the identified harm and policy conflict. For the reasons above, the appeal should be dismissed.

Robert Fallon

INSPECTOR