
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 May 2023

by John Felgate BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Decision date: 08 June 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/K0235/W/22/3312316

Land at 158 Stagsden Road, Bromham, Bedfordshire MK43 8QR

- 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 Nenad Zaric against the decision of Bedford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 22/00461/FUL, dated 16 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 4 October 2022.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a new detached dwelling to the side.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background

2. The existing property, No 158 Stagsden Road, is one half of a semi-detached pair. Planning permission for an additional dwelling at the side of the house was initially granted by the Council in 2017 (Ref 16/03562), and that scheme is said to have been commenced, by virtue of the demolition of the previously existing extension. Subsequently, further permissions were granted for two alternative schemes for the same new dwelling (18/00869 and 19/01822), the last of these being through a Section 73 variation.
3. The present appeal seeks permission for a further alternative design, replacing those previously approved, on the same site as the earlier permissions.

Main issue

4. In the light of the submissions made, the main issue in the appeal seems to me to be the effect of the proposed new design on the character and appearance of the street scene.

Reasons for decision

5. Bromham is a medium-sized village, just outside Bedford. Stagsden Road was formerly the main road through the village, prior to the opening of the A4280 Bypass, but is now relatively lightly trafficked. The appeal site lies on the north side of the road, near to the edge of the settlement. This part of the road, to the west of Partridge Lane, is semi-rural, with open fields to the south. The existing houses comprise a mixture of detached and semi-detached properties, including 2-storey houses, chalets and bungalows, dating from the mid-20th century onwards. Though no single style predominates, the properties share certain common characteristics, including their restrained, unassuming

elevations, and generally quite muted materials. Consequently, whilst individually the existing buildings are unremarkable, together they form a harmonious and cohesive group, which contributes positively to the area's attractive character.

6. The appeal site comprises part of the side garden of No 158 Stagsden Road, the remainder having been taken for the creation of an access driveway to the recently-built No 158A, which lies to the rear. Beyond this driveway is No 160 Stagsden Road, a 2-storey detached house, on slightly higher ground.
7. The new dwelling now proposed would have a width of 6.5m, filling the whole width of the available site, apart from a shared pathway between the new and existing properties. The building would have an overall depth of 18m, mostly on two floors. At first floor level, the rear wing would narrow to 5m in width, and the depth would reduce only slightly, to about 16.5m. Overall therefore, irrespective of its height, the proposed new dwelling would amount to a substantial and unusually deep building, fitted quite tightly onto a narrow plot. Its size would be clearly visible from Stagsden Road, due to the gap created by the driveway to No 158A.
8. With regard to the height, which is the focus of one of the Council's main concerns, the main front section of the building would have a steeply pitched roof, containing a bedroom and bathroom, with front rooflights and a flat-topped dormer to the rear. The height of this part would exceed that of No 158, by 1m. It would also exceed that of No 160, notwithstanding that in this case their ridge levels would be similar due to the differing ground levels. As far as I can tell, none of the other properties in this part of Stagsden Road are taller, and a number are clearly a good deal lower. Whilst in principle I agree that differences in height need not be objectionable, in this case, in the context of the building's other dimensions, it seems to me that the proposed height adds to and exacerbates the scheme's other evident shortcomings. Viewed as a whole, it seems to me that the height now proposed, in combination with the width and depth, would result in a building that would appear uncomfortably large for its site, and excessively bulky and poorly proportioned overall. As such, the scheme would fail to relate to the character of the surrounding properties, and would detract from the visual harmony and cohesion of the street scene.
9. The Council's other main concern relates to the proposed front gable feature. This would comprise a central, double-storey projecting bay, with full-height glazing, a white rendered surround and a raised, gabled pediment. As the submitted images show, the effect of this feature, with its height, verticality and strongly contrasting materials, would be both striking and dramatic. I fully accept that this would be a stylish piece of contemporary design, and that in some locations such a feature would be fully acceptable, or indeed desirable. But good design depends also on context, and in the present case the area's pleasant character rests on the rather humbler qualities that I have described earlier. Whilst some of the existing properties have gabled features of various kinds, none has anything comparable to the appeal proposal in terms of its visual assertiveness. In these surroundings, it seems to me that the central bay and gable feature now proposed would be unacceptably conspicuous, and visually over-dominant, and would thus be alien to the street scene.

10. Whilst I understand that one of the previously approved designs for the site may have had a similar depth and footprint to the present proposal, it does not appear to be suggested that any of the previous approvals were for a building of the same overall size, or that any had a similar gable feature. Nor is there any clear evidence as to whether any of the relevant permissions, other than 16/03562, remains extant as a fallback position. In the absence of any further information on these matters, I have considered the appeal proposal on its own merits.
11. Having regard to the above matters, I find that the proposed development would fail to respect the character of its surroundings, and would thus cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the street scene. In this regard the scheme would conflict with the relevant provisions of Policies 29 and 30 of the Bedford Borough Local Plan (the BBLP), adopted in January 2020, which seek to encourage a high quality of design, having proper regard for local context and local identity.

Other matter

12. The Council's second reason for refusal relates to a lack of information regarding the proposed arrangements for the storage and collection of household waste. However, the proposed dwelling would have extensive gardens to both the front and rear, which could clearly provide ample space for the storage of wheelie bins.
13. I appreciate that any bin storage point to the front of the dwelling would need to be screened, and should not dominate the foreground view from the dwelling; and also that the Council's technical guidance seeks to limit the distance that householders are required to pull their bins for collection. These are clearly reasonable requirements, but given the space available, there seems no reason to doubt that they could be complied with. In any event, it appears that none of these was an obstacle to the grant of the previous permissions on the site.
14. In the circumstances, there seems no reason why this matter could not have been dealt with by condition.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons set out above, I have found that the appeal proposal would conflict with BBLP Policies 29 and 30, due to the harm that it would cause to the character and appearance of the local street scene. No material considerations have been substantiated that weigh in favour of a decision other than in accordance with the development plan. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Felgate

INSPECTOR