
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 May 2023

by Les Greenwood MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th June 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/N0410/D/23/3315604

63 Camp Road, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire SL9 7PF

- 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 Mansi Thakur against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council.
 - The application Ref PL/22/2592/FA, dated 19 July 2022, was refused by notice dated 7 November 2022.
 - The development proposed is the reconfiguration and extension of the existing dwelling.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

2. The main issues are the effects of the proposal on:
 - i) The character and appearance of the local area; and
 - ii) Biodiversity, in terms of the potential effect on bats.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. Camp Road lies within a private estate of detached houses on large plots in a leafy, semi-rural setting. The area is designated as a Residential Area of Exceptional Character (RAEC) by the South Bucks District Local Plan - Consolidated September 2007 & February 2011 (LP). The Council's Townscape Character Study (TCS) aptly notes that the variety of architectural approaches is a distinctive characteristic of the Camp Road area, with buildings generally well-integrated into the topography. It says that most houses are individual architect designed buildings, with coherence created by the regular plot pattern and landscape character.
4. No 63 is a typical example - a large detached house with a highly articulated form including gables, dormer windows and Neo-Tudor detailing on the front elevation. The proposal would completely reconfigure the house in a classical, Neo-Georgian style, retaining some elements of the existing structure but demolishing others, including the garaging, and adding extensions. The new front elevation would include tall sash windows, columns and pediments. The

new roof structure would feature parapet balustrades, steep pitched Mansard type roofs with multiple dormer windows and a high level flat roof with a dome projecting out of its centre.

5. The resulting building would have the appearance of a Neo-Georgian mansion, with a box-like form and a formal style. Whilst the integrity of the architectural approach is appreciated, the house would nevertheless contrast significantly with the generally more informally designed houses in the local area. Where other Neo-Georgian houses have been built nearby, these tend to be less intensely realised. They generally have simpler hipped roofs rather than Mansard roofs and ornate balustrades, which helps them to blend more easily into the existing housing mix and rural/suburban environment.
6. The proposed dome would be substantially higher than neighbouring dwellings and, though possibly only glimpsed from the street due to its set back within the large flat roof, would also very much be an uncharacteristic feature of the area. Although there are other large houses in the neighbourhood, the combination of the lack of any articulation to break down the building's massing and the large scale of the second floor/roof structure would tend to make the building look uncharacteristically bulky and massive.
7. The house sits on the outside of a bend, where it is prominent in views from the street to the north and opposite. Views from the street to the south are currently screened by a tall evergreen hedge, but that hedge is unlikely to last as long as the proposed permanent structure. If and when the hedge is removed, the house would be prominent in those views as well, making it a focal point in a wide range of local views.
8. The proposal would thus sit poorly within this street scene, contrasting with nearby buildings and standing out as an unsympathetically designed anomaly, even within this area where architectural variety is a valued aspect of local character. I conclude that it would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the local area. It therefore conflicts with the shared aims of policy CP8 of the South Bucks District Core Strategy, policies EP3, H10 and H11 and Appendix 8 of the LP, the TCS, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and policy C1 of the National Design Guide, to promote high quality design and prevent poor designs which are out of scale or character with their surroundings, with particular regard to the District's designated RAECs.

Biodiversity

9. The proposal includes the removal of the existing roofs, which could provide shelter or roosting spaces for bats. As bats are European Protected Species, a Preliminary Ecological Assessment was submitted with the application. This initial survey report indicates a need for further emergence surveys, to check the extent to which bats are using the roofs. No further survey report has been submitted. The appellant argues that a follow up survey would be purely precautionary, so that there is no reason why it could not be conditioned as part of a planning permission.
10. Government Circular 06/2005 states that it is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by proposed development, is established before planning permission is granted,

otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision. It continues to say that the need to ensure ecological surveys are carried out should therefore only be left to coverage under planning conditions in exceptional circumstances.

11. No such exceptional circumstances have been put forward in this case. In the absence of the recommended additional survey work, which would better establish the potential of the proposal to harm bats, and in light of the substantial scale of the proposed roof alterations, I find that there is significant potential here for such harm to be caused. I make this as a proportional assessment in line with the Planning Practice Guidance, taking into account the nature and scale of the proposed works as well as the burdens entailed in a requirement for further survey work.
12. I conclude that the proposal would cause unacceptable risk of harm to local biodiversity, with regard to potential effects on bats. It therefore conflicts with the shared aims of CS Policy CP9 and the Framework, to conserve and enhance local biodiversity.

Conclusion

13. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

Les Greenwood

INSPECTOR