

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 May 2023

by Andrew Dale BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19th June 2023

Appeal Ref. APP/N1540/D/22/3312460

49 Bellfield Gardens, Church Langley, Harlow CM17 9QN

- 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 Przemyslaw Michalak against the decision of Harlow District Council.
 - The application ref. HW/HSE/22/00435, dated 6 July 2022, was refused by notice dated 2 November 2022.
 - The development proposed is a single storey front extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Matter of clarification

2. In the papers before me, I have come across 2 slightly different versions of the street name. The one that appears in the heading above is taken from the information provided on the appeal form and the application form and reflects the name plate at the entrance into the street from Kiln Lane.

Main issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed single storey front extension upon the character and appearance of the host dwelling and its surroundings.

Reasons

4. Bellfield Gardens is a cul-de-sac of predominantly detached, semi-detached and terraced dwellings, some of which are sited along shared access drives. Nos 47, 48 and 49 comprise a short terrace of 2-storey houses made distinctive by their red brick construction, matching front door canopies and angled arrangement in relation to a curve in the main highway and a footpath (known as Bridle Way according to the appellant) through the estate which crosses Bellfield Gardens next to no. 49. Whilst these 3 houses are not in a straight line, they are still instantly recognizable as a terraced composition.
 5. Front extensions and porches are not prevailing features of the original housing along Bellfield Gardens. Many of the houses have a simple front door hood or canopy finished in tiles or lead. This makes for a locally distinctive pattern of development. There are fully enclosed porches at the front of nos 27 and 39
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but being of very limited depth and width, they are minor elements in views along the street. Collectively, the houses display sufficient visual coherence and uniformity in the built form that addresses the street to warrant careful constraints over proposals for front additions and porches.

6. Indeed, the appellant has not drawn my attention to any specific and obvious examples of front extensions. He asserts that no. 53 "*...has been extended up to the road edge with a 4 storey extension...*". No planning history for this property has been submitted, so I am reluctant to draw any firm conclusions from it. From what I could see, this is a gable-fronted, 2-storey, semi-detached house with further accommodation in the roof space. It would appear that a 2-storey extension with rooms in the roof space above may have been added at the side where there is a private drive leading to nos 50, 51 and 52. The front elevation facing Bellfield Gardens does not appear to have been materially extended since its original construction.
7. No. 49 has a relatively large front garden. It is physically able to accommodate the sizeable single storey front extension proposed which would be 3.5 m deep and over 5 m wide and provide a bedroom and an enlarged hall. Even so, the front elevation and front garden are very prominent in direct views across the property's access from Bellfield Gardens and from 2 public routes that approach the site from the opposite (southern) side of Bellfield Gardens, one of which is part of the footpath through the estate. The hedging and trees that are present would be ineffective as screening features in those views, even though they would provide a reasonable screen when walking along the footpath that passes adjacent to the eastern boundary of the appeal property and when approaching along Bellfield Gardens from the entrance off Kiln Lane.
8. Despite the use of matching materials, the mass, bulk, design and location of the proposed single storey front extension would make it an obvious element that would stand out well forward of the host property's principal elevation. It would be significantly larger than a porch and would not be sufficiently subservient or complementary to the original building. Instead, it would be clearly visible as an incongruous, bulky and dominant appendage to the front of the dwelling, significantly changing and damaging its appearance. Since the resulting dwelling would be uncharacteristic of the host terrace and the fairly uniform estate design hereabouts, the proposal would detract from the area's local character and the street scene. That the extension would reach beyond the northern gable end of the dwelling and would include a roof with a far shallower pitch angle than that of the main roof would add to the unfortunate visual impact of the scheme.
9. In my opinion, the proposal would have a seriously disruptive visual effect upon the host property and this local street scene. That the proposal disregards the design guidance in the Harlow Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2011 (SPD) confirms my findings on this issue in the particular circumstances of this case. The SPD explains, amongst other things, that front extensions and porches should only be permitted where applicants can demonstrate through the characterisation studies that these features are prevailing features of the original housing within their area. Where permissible, porches should generally not exceed 1.5 m in depth.

10. Considering the case on its individual merits, I find on the main issue that the proposed single storey front extension would harm the character and appearance of the host dwelling and its surroundings. As the development would not reach a high standard of urban and architectural design, fail to be visually attractive, take insufficient account of local distinctiveness, character and context and depart too far from the Council's relevant design guidance, there would be conflict with the design principles of Policy PL1 of the Harlow Local Development Plan 2020. Good design is also a cornerstone of the National Planning Policy Framework.
11. My finding on the main issue is decisive to the outcome of this appeal. There is conflict with the development plan. The harm cannot be mitigated by the imposition of planning conditions and it is not outweighed by other material considerations, including the improvements the scheme would bring about to the extent and layout of the internal habitable floor space.
12. For the reasons given above and taking into account all other matters raised, the planning history of the site and the absence of objections from local residents, I conclude that this appeal should not succeed.

Andrew Dale

INSPECTOR