

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 July 2023

by R Gee BA (Hons) Dip TP PGCert UD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 September 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/P0240/D/23/3314857

Meppershall Airfield, Campton Road, Shefford SG17 5PB

- 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 Andrew Brankley against the decision of Central Bedfordshire Council.
 - The application Ref CB/22/02025/FULL, dated 3 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 7 November 2022.
 - The development proposed is described as two storey side extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for a two storey side extension at Meppershall Airfield, Campton Road, Shefford SG17 5PB in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref CB/22/02025/FULL, dated 3 March 2022, subject to the following conditions:
 1. The development hereby permitted shall begin no later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: CBC - LB-0255-PL-02A - REVISED - Meppershall Airfield, Campton Road, Shefford House Extension.
 3. The extension hereby permitted shall not be occupied at any time other than for purposes ancillary to the residential use of the dwelling known as Standalone Farm House, Meppershall Airfield.

Applications for Costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr Andrew Brankley against Central Bedfordshire Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. The appellant has drawn my attention to an incorrect post code being cited on the planning application. For preciseness I have used the correct postcode in my banner heading.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - i) whether or not the proposed development would constitute a separate dwelling;
 - ii) the effect on highway safety; and

- iii) the effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Whether a separate dwelling

5. The Council has alleged that the proposal would be tantamount to a self-contained independent residential unit that would result in unacceptable visual harm through domestication and urbanisation of the rural area and open countryside location. The proposed development has been applied for as an extension and the householder application form submitted. Notwithstanding the scale of the extension and the inclusion of a separate front door and hallway, based on the plans and the evidence before me the proposed development would be physically attached to the existing dwelling, including an internal access at both ground and first floor.
6. In addition, the future occupiers of the annex would share the same access, parking and garden areas as the host dwelling. Accordingly, the layout, design and physical relationship between the existing dwelling and the proposed extension demonstrates a clear connection with the main dwelling such that the proposed development would be an annex not a separate residential unit. Any future desire to occupy the annex as a wholly independent residence would require planning permission.
7. As the proposed development would be an extension to the host dwelling, and not an independent dwelling, I find no conflict with Policy SP7 of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015-2035 (LP) which relates to Windfall Development which seeks to restrict new residential development outside the settlement envelope in recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Highway safety

8. The proposed development would utilise the access and egress point used by the existing dwelling and the airfield. On the basis that the proposed development would not form an independent residential unit there would not be a material increase in vehicular movements associated with the proposed development. Parking could be accommodated within the site and as ancillary accommodation there would not be a significant intensification in the use of the existing access.
9. Accordingly, I find no conflict with Policy T2 of the LP which amongst others, requires development to provide a safe and convenient access. I also find no conflict with the Framework which states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Character and appearance

10. Whilst the existing dwelling lies in open countryside, beyond a settlement, the appeal site relates to a parcel of land adjacent to the existing dwelling and a commercial building associated with Meppershall Airfield. The proposed development would be positioned in a relatively small gap between these

existing built developments and therefore the appeal site does not have an open rural appearance.

11. The proposed development would be largely obscured by the presence of existing built development and substantial landscaping to the site boundaries. The positioning of the proposed development would not encroach into a field. For these reasons, the proposed development would not result in the alleged harm in respect of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
12. From the limited information available to me, whilst the existing property may have been previously extended, being physically attached to the existing dwelling, the proposed development would be well-related to existing built form and would not result in a proliferation of additional stand-alone buildings. It would be of a design reflective of the existing dwelling in terms of its roof profile, incorporation of dormer windows and external materials finish. In addition, the proposed development would be subservient to the host property through the incorporation of a lower ridge height when compared to the existing roof. Whilst the proposed development would be screened by substantial landscaping to the site frontage this cannot be guaranteed to be retained in the future. Nevertheless, the proposal would be viewed in the context of existing built development. For these reasons, I do not concur that the proposed development would have an adverse urbanising or visual impact on the character of the site.
13. My attention has been drawn to a previous decision¹, however, from the limited information available to me I do not consider the proposals to be directly comparable as the description of the development and location differed. In any event, I have determined the appeal before me on its own merits.
14. For the reasons set out above I find no conflict with Policy HQ1 of the LP which requires the size, scale, massing, orientation, materials and appearance of development to relate well to the existing local surroundings and reinforce local distinctiveness. I find no conflict with Policy EE5 of the LP which amongst others requires new development to reflect the local character and distinctiveness in terms of the scale and pattern of the surrounding landscape and existing settlement form. Nor do I find conflict with the Central Bedfordshire Design Guide (March 2014) which provides guidance for householder alterations and extensions or the Framework which seeks to protect the open countryside and secure high-quality design.

Other Matters

15. Interested parties have raised concerns with regards to the loss of agricultural land, impact of the aircraft noise on the future occupiers of the proposed development and absence of ecological reports. As the appeal site is currently hardstanding there would be no loss of agricultural land or habitat. As the proposed development relates to an annex to the existing dwelling, a condition requiring an electric car charging point would not be reasonable or necessary. The Council's Pollution Officer did not raise any concerns regarding the impact of noise from the airfield on the living conditions of the development. As the host dwelling is associated with the airfield and the proposal is an extension to it, I do not have any concerns in this regard. These, however, are neutral matters in the determination of the appeal.

¹ MB/02/01321/FULL

16. I note that the proposals are intended to provide suitable accommodation for family members for health reasons. Therefore, I have had regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The duty includes having regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and advance equality of opportunity between those sharing relevant protected characteristics and those who do not. Whilst I am mindful of the needs of the family members, it does not alter my findings on the main issues.

Conditions

17. The Council has provided a list of suggested conditions that it considers would be appropriate. In addition to the standard time limit condition, it is necessary to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans for the reason of certainty.
18. For certainty, a condition is also required in respect of the occupancy of the annexe.
19. The Council has suggested a condition for the provision of visibility splays. Whilst emerging visibility from the existing access was restricted, I observed Campton Road to be lightly trafficked at the time of my site visit. As I have found there would not be a material increase in traffic movements associated with the proposed development, I do not consider this request to be proportionate to the scale of development proposed. Such a condition would therefore not be reasonable or necessary and would not meet the tests set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and guidance in the Planning Practice Guide.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons set out above, and having had regard to all other matters raised, the proposal would comply with the development plan and Framework as a whole. The appeal is therefore allowed.

R Gee

INSPECTOR