
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 January 2024

by S. Hartley BA (Hons) Dist.TP (Manc) DMS MRTPI MRICS

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 01.02.2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Y0435/D/23/3329725

2, Bellis Grove, Woughton on the Green, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK6 3EZ

- 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 Phillip and Mrs Martene Coe against the decision of Milton Keynes City Council.
 - The application Ref: 23/01560/HOU, dated 10 July 2023, was refused by notice dated 4 September 2023.
 - The development proposed is for a solar panel installation.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (the Framework) was revised on 19 December 2023. The amendments made did not have a material bearing upon the issues in this appeal, and it was therefore not necessary to seek comments from the main parties upon it. Where I have referred to the Framework, it is that of the December 2023 version.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Woughton on the Green Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

4. The CA, designated in 1978, is characterised by its dispersed arrangement of cottages, farmhouses and outbuildings with the green at its core. The CA was extended in 2022 to include more modern buildings, including the appeal building, though the sense of a rural settlement set amongst fields remains. The CA Review document (2022) notes that '*building types, materials, construction methods and built forms still impart a strong and characterful sense of place*'. The buildings include timber framed houses, some thatched, but also buildings made from local red brick. Within this part of the CA, most of the roofs are unbroken and this simplicity and consistency adds positively to the character of the area.

5. The Review document describes Bellis Grove as '*contemporary housing in a historically sensitive location*' where the houses adopt '*stylised barn forms that echo the scale, volumes and materials found in rural farmsteads in the locality*' with a slightly reduced build height and with the main body of the dwellings at the back of the plot. These matters, largely shared by the appeal building, add positively to the significance of the CA as a whole.
6. The appeal property has a mainly unbroken red tile roof which, together with its red brick walls, adds positively to its attractive appearance within the CA. The proposed solar panels would cover a large proportion of the south facing roof of the main house. Their black colour and appearance on the red tile roof would have a significant and adverse impact upon its appearance and when seen from the adjoining access road.
7. The appellant has referred to houses within the CA which have solar panels attached to their roofs. However, on my site visit I was able to note that this is not a common occurrence and I do not consider that they represent a precedent. In any event, I have determined the appeal proposal upon its individual merits and considering the overall distinctive characteristics of the CA.
8. In this regard, I attach very significant weight to paragraph 205 of the Framework which states that '*great weight should be given to the asset's conservation*'. In the context of paragraph 208 of the Framework, the proposed development would cause less than substantial harm to the CA. In such circumstances, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
9. I recognise that the proposed development would help to reduce carbon emissions and would thus lead to a public gain. I also give significant weight to paragraph 163 of the Framework which states that '*even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to significant cutting greenhouse gas emissions*.'
10. However, such a public gain would not in this instance outweigh the adverse harm which would be caused to the character and appearance of the CA. Moreover, I have no evidence before me to indicate that other options would not be available to secure sensitive energy efficiencies to the building, thereby making a positive contribution to environmental sustainability.
11. Therefore, on balance, I conclude that the proposed development would not accord with policies D1 and D2 of the Milton Keynes Plan:MK 2016-2031 which require good design appropriate to the character of the site and surrounding area, or with policy HE1 which requires development to sustain or enhance the significance of heritage assets. It would also be contrary to chapter 16 of the Framework which requires the same, and with the Council's Residential Design Guide Supplementary Design Guide 2012 which promotes good design.

Conclusion

12. For the above reasons, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

S. Hartley

INSPECTOR