

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 January 2024

by Andrew Dale BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6th February 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/D/23/3331680

Harvest Farm, Pirton Road, Holwell, Hitchin SG5 3SS

- 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 S Laird against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application ref. 23/01886/FPH, dated 9 August 2023, was refused by notice dated 28 September 2023.
 - The development proposed is erection of a single storey detached double carport.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed single storey detached double carport upon the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings, including the Pirton Road street scene.

Reasons

3. Harvest Farm is an extended detached 2-storey house. It is set well back from the western side of Pirton Road which progresses north-south through the village of Holwell between Holwell Road and Waterloo Lane. There is generally linear development to a fairly regular building line along Pirton Road and within the village as a whole, which lies in a rural area beyond the Green Belt. This is not a village characterised by close-knit development or by a strong degree of enclosure to the public realm.
 4. The wide front garden of Harvest Farm, where the carport would be erected, is mainly given over to hard surfacing apart from a detached double garage sited close behind the front boundary wall to the south of the entrance gates.
 5. That double garage was granted planning permission in 2015 well before the adoption of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (LP) in 2022. Owing to its size, advanced position, height above the front boundary wall and the lack of any strong natural screening, it is prominent within the street scene.
 6. I did not observe any other detached garages or carports standing directly between the houses and the roadside along the whole length of Pirton Road that have a comparable impact to that garage building. Although many of the other properties do have garages, these tend to be integral garages or ones
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that are set back from or to the side of their respective dwellings. Walking the full length of Pirton Road, I saw only 2 exceptions to that development pattern, apart from the existing double garage at the front of the appeal site.

7. The first is the detached garage in the front garden of Finchden next to Harvest Farm. I have no details about its planning history. Still, it is a single garage of modest height and size. It is set well back into the site behind mature roadside hedging with other shrubs and trees retained in the front garden providing further screening. This garage has little effect on the street scene. The second exception is a very small garage at New Rectory on the opposite side of the road to Harvest Farm. It is separated from the roadside by a wide strip of elevated ground that contains several mature trees. It makes no material impression on the street scene.
8. The appeal scheme sought to address the reason for the refusal of a planning application (ref. 22/02232/FPH) for a proposal that would have included a second detached double garage towards the front of the plot. I have carefully reflected upon the changes made for the proposed carport in terms of footprint, siting and overall design. Still, this carport would offer 2 covered car parking spaces, be 6.10 m wide by 5.40 m deep and have a steeply pitched and tiled roof, above its timber legs, reaching about 4.6 m high at the ridge. It would be sited on the northern side of the entrance gates only 2.4 m back from the front boundary wall which is just about 1.65 m above ground level at that point.
9. Given its location well in advance of the host dwelling towards the front boundary and its height and size, the proposed carport would be readily apparent in views above the boundary wall from both approaches to the site along Pirton Road. Even with a building design and materials that are not unattractive, it would stand out as a prominent building in this section of the road. Together with the existing double garage, it would clutter up and dominate the frontage of the host property, inevitably obscure further views of the dwelling behind despite the use of timber legs and produce a built-up pattern of frontage development quite unlike anything else along Pirton Road. I consider that the proposed carport would be a step in the wrong direction because it would neither respond positively to the site's local context nor represent a discreet or satisfactorily sensitive addition to this street scene. Granting planning permission could make it more difficult to resist future proposals for large structures across and overdevelopment of front garden areas, further eroding the character and appearance of Pirton Road.
10. I find on the main issue that the proposed single storey detached double carport would materially harm the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings, including the Pirton Road street scene. This would run contrary to LP Policies D1 and D2 which, when read together, seek to ensure that development proposals respond positively to the site's local context and that outbuildings do not harm the character and appearance of the site and are located so as not to have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the street scene or area.
11. There is conflict with the development plan. Good design is also a cornerstone of the National Planning Policy Framework; this would not be achieved. The revised versions of that document, which were published in December 2023, do

not materially differ to the September 2023 version, insofar as the planning policy context around the main issue in this appeal is concerned.

12. LP Policy SP2 is a strategic policy covering the settlement hierarchy and the spatial distribution of development. It has little relevance to this case and even where infilling is allowed in Holwell, it would have to be of good quality design. I interpret part d) of LP Policy CGB4 as applying to outbuildings that are proposed where planning permission is being considered for the reuse, replacement or extension of the main building(s) on a site in the rural area beyond the Green Belt. The appellant says that only limited weight should be afforded to the Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) given its age. I note that the Council did not refer to it in its decision notice or delegated file note. In any event, no copy of the SPD has been provided by either party.
13. The harm cannot be mitigated by the imposition of planning conditions and it is not outweighed by other considerations, including the stated need for the provision of further safe accommodation for the vehicles of the occupiers of Harvest Farm, all of whom are said to drive motor vehicles and to rely on car travel in this area.
14. For the reasons given above and taking into account all other matters raised and the absence of objections from the Parish Council and local residents, I conclude that this appeal should not succeed.

Andrew Dale

INSPECTOR