



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 9 January 2024

by O S Woodward BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 February 2024

Appeal A - Ref: APP/C1570/W/23/3325774 **Mount House, High Street, Widdington, Essex**

- 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 and Mrs Mount against the decision of Uttlesford District Council.
 - The application Ref UTT/23/0565/HHF, dated 5 March 2023, was refused by notice dated 26 April 2023.
 - The development proposed is a single storey side and part two storey part single storey rear extension.
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Appeal B - Ref: APP/C1570/Y/23/3325776 **Mount House, High Street, Widdington, Essex**

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr and Mrs Mount against the decision of Uttlesford District Council.
 - The application Ref UTT/23/0566/LB, dated 5 March 2023, was refused by notice dated 25 April 2023.
 - The works proposed are a single storey side and part two storey part single storey rear extension.
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Decisions

1. Appeal A is dismissed.
2. Appeal B is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

3. A revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was released after the main parties had submitted their statements of case for the appeals. However, the revised Framework does not contain any changes material to the appeals and I have therefore determined the appeals on the basis of the revised Framework and without needing to revert to the parties for comments.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposed works on the special interest and heritage significance of the listed building (Appeals A and B); and,

- the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, including whether or not it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Widdington Conservation Area (Appeal A).

Reasons

Listed building

Significance

5. The appeal relates to one of a pair of semi-detached dwellings, collectively known as 'the cottage next to the post office' on the official listing. The building, ie both dwellings combined, is grade II Listed¹. Both dwellings are modestly sized agricultural workers properties, constructed of yellow brick with red brick detailing. It is noted as being an advanced project for its period in the list description, providing some historic interest. The fenestration is timber framed and some of it is potentially original.
6. The appeal property has a relatively large ground floor rear extension, built out of yellow bricks although slightly mis-matched to the original bricks, with a pitched roof and rooflights. It is a clearly modern construction that is read as such due to the different materials and roof form. The rear extension is relatively large, but because it is not full width and the roof is sloped to reduce its bulk, the building has maintained its modest nature and scale. There is also a separate, small lean-to extension to the rear, set against the main rear extension, and independently accessed through a small door in the original rear elevation. This is a poor quality, modern construction, and provides ancillary/storage floorspace.
7. Internally, two openings have been created in the original rear wall to provide access to the rear extension. Some of the original fabric in the rear wall has therefore been lost and the extension has also changed the plan form by introducing a relatively large extension as a proportion of the original modest floorspace. At first floor level, it is not clear from the evidence before me what the original plan form of the property was, but there has been a re-configuration to provide a new staircase to access the first floor, including a non-original partition wall. Nevertheless, the two bedroom layout at first floor level is likely to be largely the same as original.
8. The entrance door has been moved from the front elevation to the side. I am unclear precisely how much these works involved loss of historic fabric but it is likely that, in addition to the door itself and the replacement window to the front elevation, some of the side elevation wall around the new door was also replaced in order to install the door.
9. Overall, there have been limited changes to the properties. The plan form of the appeal property is largely original and legible as a modest dwelling, despite the rear extension. There has been some loss of historic fabric, but this is relatively limited. The adjoining property appears to be even more original, at least externally. The significance of the building primarily lies in the largely unchanged external appearance to the front and side elevations, and to a lesser, but still important, degree from retained historic fabric and plan form, and that it has retained its modest scale and character.

¹ List entry number 1274211

Proposal

10. The proposal includes the demolition of the existing extension and lean-to, to be replaced by a larger ground floor extension. This would be of matching brick to the main building, with a slate roof to match the material of the roof of the main building. A first floor closet wing extension is also proposed to the rear. This would be timber boarded and would have a hipped roof tying into the main roof of the property with matching eaves heights and materials, though set down from the main ridge height. A side extension/porch is proposed, which would be rendered with matching tiles to the slate roof. There would be doors and full length windows to the ground floor at the rear and either 3x3 or 2x3 panel timber-framed windows elsewhere.
11. Internally, the existing two arched entrances to the rear extension would be retained. The existing access to the lean-to extension would be infilled. The current entrance door and some of the surrounding brickwork would be replaced, but a door would be maintained, albeit now internal within the proposed porch, in the same location as existing along the original side elevation. At first floor level, the second bedroom would be reconfigured to afford access to the proposed third bedroom in the closet wing extension. This would involve the loss of a non-original partition wall. The two existing, historic timber framed windows to the rear would both be lost to facilitate the new extension, and a replacement timber framed window is proposed in a different location, to the side of the proposed extension.

Assessment

12. The scale of the existing main rear extension to the appeal property detracts slightly from its significance, but it is not full width and the gabled roof form further reduces its effect on the modest nature of the property. The lean-to is unattractive but insubstantial. In contrast, the proposed works would significantly increase the volume and scale of the currently modest property. The ground floor extension would become full width. The first floor closet wing would appear as a substantial addition, at approximately three-quarters width and being internally at least as large as either of the existing bedrooms in the main building. The porch would add further additional floorspace and in a prominent location, visible from the street.
13. Notwithstanding the fact that the current proposals represent a more sympathetic design compared to a previously refused scheme, the extensions would not be subservient to the original property or building. They would undermine its modest nature and appear unbalanced when viewed against the virtually unaltered other half of the semi-detached dwellings. In addition, there would be the loss of historic fabric in the form of the rear windows at first floor level.
14. The modest scale and appearance of the building and the retained historic fabric are two important elements of its significance. The harm that would be caused by the proposed works to these two elements would therefore harm the special interest and heritage significance of the listed building. The proposal therefore fails to comply with s16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) (the Act). It also fails to comply with Policy ENV2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan 2005 (the LP), which reflects the provisions of the Act.

15. The appellant suggests that the porch would mirror the design of that at Ring Cottage. However, there is nothing before me to indicate when the Ring Cottage alterations occurred. Reference is also made to alterations to other nearby properties. However, I am required to assess the appeal scheme against current legislation and policy, in relation to both of which I have found harm.

Character and appearance

Existing

16. The Widdington Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals (October 2013) sets out the significance of the CA. Drawing on this and my own assessment, insofar as is relevant to the appeal proposal the significance of the CA relates to the intrinsic architectural quality and immediate setting of the appeal building. It also relates to the group value of the nearby buildings on the western side of the High Street, in particular the also grade II Listed² semi-detached pair of cottages known as Ring Cottage and Vine Cottage, then a further pair of cottages, albeit unlisted to the south. These buildings are modestly scaled period cottages set in a slightly elevated position behind verdant front gardens, adding to their prominence and attractiveness. There have been some alterations to the properties, including side and rear extensions. However, their coherence as a group has not been significantly undermined.

Assessment

17. The proposal would retain the existing front elevation and the proposed fenestration to the extensions would be timber framed and with window pane patterns that respect the historic fenestration. The larger windows and doors to the ground floor would be acceptable at this level to the rear. The timber boarding to the first floor rear extension reflects that used to some of the existing extensions to the other buildings, and is a material found elsewhere in the CA. The detailed design and proposed materials would, therefore, be acceptable. There are rear and side extensions to the other four dwellings within the 'group' of three semi-detached dwellings and the proposal would, therefore not directly harm the coherence of the group.
18. However, the proposed extensions would be relatively extensive, particularly to the rear. The adjoining semi-detached dwelling does not have similar extensions and they would therefore unbalance the pair of dwellings. As stated above, the extensions would harm the modest nature of the host building, which, in its prominent position on High Street, contributes to the character and appearance of the CA. Therefore, whilst the degree of harm would be limited in extent, the proposal would nonetheless fail to comply with s72 of the Act. Similarly it would also conflict with Policies GEN2, ENV1 and H8 of the LP, which require high quality design and the preservation of the character and appearance of conservation areas. It also fails to comply with Chapters 12 and 16 of the Framework, which require high quality design and highlights the desirability of sustaining the significance of heritage assets.

² List entry number 1274165

19. The decision notice refers to Policy S3 but this is in relation to Key Rural Settlements and Whittington is not one of these settlements. This policy is not, therefore, relevant to the appeal.

Planning Balance

20. I assess the level of harm to the listed building and to the CA to be less than substantial. Paragraph 208 of the Framework states that states that, where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of heritage assets, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including securing its optimum viable use.
21. In this case, the proposal would increase the size of the dwelling. This would create an extra bedroom and also provide a ground floor toilet. I note that the appellant has referred to the need for these changes to improve the quality of accommodation for their family. However, these are private benefits. There is no evidence before me that the changes are required to retain active use of the appeal property.
22. I place great weight on the harms I have identified to both the listed building and the CA, as directed by Paragraph 205 of the Framework. As set out above, the benefits of the proposal are limited. The proposal therefore fails to comply with the development plan and the Act, and there are no material considerations that indicate I should take a decision otherwise.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons above, the appeals are dismissed.

O S Woodward
INSPECTOR