
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 April 2025

by A Knight BA PG Dip MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14th April 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/A1530/W/24/3354354

Somerton House, Green Lane, Boxted, Essex CO4 5TR

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Amanda Thompson against the decision of Colchester City Council.
 - The application Ref is 241433.
 - The development proposed is a replacement dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site (the site) is in the village of Boxted, a dispersed settlement to the north of Colchester. The land around the village is mainly agricultural or wooded, and roads therein are generally simple country lanes, enclosed by greenery but with intermittent views of open countryside beyond. Boxted has a pronounced bucolic feel.
4. The eastern end of Green Lane (the street) is flanked on either side by detached residential dwellings in a broadly uniform layout. Many of these dwellings appear to date from the mid-20th Century onwards, and historic maps provided by the appellant confirm this is so. Nevertheless, the narrowness of the roadway, the absence of modern features such as pavements and streetlights, and the undeveloped nature of the wider setting combine to give the street a rural character from which it draws charm. The dwellings therein, whilst varied in terms of architectural style and external materials, contribute to the rural feel through the traditional nature of their design and appearance. Pitched roofs and gable ends are ubiquitous, and houses generally present traditional front elevation and entrance details towards the street.
5. The appeal site includes a detached dwelling (the house) set slightly further back from the street than its immediate neighbours and with a large outbuilding to the front. Whilst the house is unremarkable, it is nevertheless pleasant, and adheres to the prevailing local character in that it has a tall, pitched roof and presents a large brick gable end and simple front entrance to the road. The traditional appearance of the house is underlined by details such as a pitched roof on the outbuilding, decorative brickwork near the eaves of the gable, and the inclusion of a modest

pitched roof dormer in the front-facing roof slope, that references the main gable end. Overall, its design features make the house typical of, and a contributor towards, the traditional, rural character of the street, which itself adheres and contributes to the rural village characteristics of Boxted.

6. Discussions have taken place between the main parties as to whether the appeal site is within a settlement boundary. The Council accepts that it is and based on the evidence before me I see no reason to view the matter any differently. As such, the appeal proposal has policy support in principle subject to compliance with more detailed policy requirements.
7. The proposal includes the demolition of the existing house and outbuilding, and the erection of a new detached dwelling, along with an outbuilding to the front. The proposed house would be lower than the existing one and sit further back from the street, behind a new drystone wall and landscaping. Even so, the proposal would be visible from the street. It would have a striking, contemporary appearance including a wide, flat roof, a projecting upper storey, vertical rectangular floor-to-ceiling glazing, and a double-height central block in which a cantilevered storm porch and inset entrance door would be the only interruptions to a front elevation otherwise comprising continuous fair-faced concrete.
8. Within itself, the design has a simple elegance, and I do not find the proposal bland, ugly, or akin to a 1960s car park as advanced by the Council. Furthermore, I have been provided with no evidence that it would age poorly or become marred by staining. Nevertheless, the arrestingly modernist nature of the proposal would be wholly at odds with the prevailing traditional character of housing in the area. This conflict would be exacerbated by the width of the dwelling and the size and contemporary design of the front outbuilding, both of which would increase the prominence of the development. Even if the timber cladding and brickwork in the front elevation were made using materials common to Boxted, they would be deployed in a design so alien to the setting that any sense of connection to place would be lost. Overall, the proposal would be jarringly at odds with its surroundings, and harmfully undermine the cohesion of the street to the detriment of the area.
9. Whilst I have reached a more positive view than the Council as to the design merits of the proposal, I see no evidence that it is outstanding or innovative. Rather, its reasonable design quality alone is not capable of overcoming the harm its incongruity would cause to the character and appearance of the area. I also see no reason to think the standard of design in the village is such that the appeal proposal would help to raise it; even those local houses that would make no claim to notable architectural merit generally adhere to established characteristics and, as such, support the rural village feel of Boxted.
10. I recognise that the proposals would result in an energy efficient home, built to modern standards. I have no evidence, however, that the existing dwelling is particularly poorly performing in that respect, or that if it is, it could not be improved. As a result, the benefits associated with greater energy efficiency carry little weight in my determination. Similarly, whilst I do not doubt that the proposal would provide a high standard of living for occupants of the site, including greater provision of natural light and ventilation, I have no reason to think the current house is harmfully deficient in such respects, or that it could not be improved.

11. The proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area, contrary to Policies SP7 and DM15 of the Colchester Borough Local Plan 2013-2033 (2021). These policies require, amongst other things, that development respect, enhance, and respond positively to the character of the site, its context, and surroundings in terms of its architectural approach. The proposal would also conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework where it requires development be sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. It does not represent appropriate innovation or change, as it would not maintain a strong sense of place.

Conclusion

12. I conclude that the proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. The appeal is dismissed.

A Knight

INSPECTOR