



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 January 2026

by T Bennett BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 JANUARY 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/D/25/3375631

14 West Common Grove, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2LL

- 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 Mr & Mrs Culmer and Bailey against the decision of St Albans City Council.
 - The application Ref is 5/2025/1473.
 - The development proposed is single storey front, rear and side extension, internal alterations to openings, solar panels. Detached garage, new boundary treatment to southern elevation, closure of driveway on southern end of plot with hedging.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The description of development has been taken from the decision notice which has also been used on the appeal form.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposed development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Harpenden Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located within the CA. The statutory duty set out in Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the PLBCAA) requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.
5. As Policy 85 of the City and District of St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994 ('LP') requires development in conservation areas to enhance or preserve their appearance, it reflects that statutory test.
6. Amongst other matters, LP Policy 72 sets out that extensions shall be compatible with the original building with regard to matters including roof form, particularly in conservation areas and reflect the character and appearance of the street.
7. The significance of the CA as a whole is derived, in part, from the presence of traditionally designed dwellings located in spacious plots. I accept that not all elements of a conservation area necessarily contribute to its significance, however although West Common Grove features a variety of property styles, pitched, cohesive roof forms are an overriding feature of the area's traditional character in streetscene views.

8. The appeal property is a detached bungalow with a pitched roof and projecting front gable. Although it does not exude the architectural qualities, such as brick detailing and imitation timber framing, observed on many of the traditional original properties within the CA, its roof form is of a traditional, cohesive form, which is consistent with other properties within the streetscene and the wider CA. It therefore does not detract from the significance of the CA. It sits comfortably within its surroundings and makes a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the CA.
9. Whilst the proposal would retain the existing pitched roof on the main part of the dwelling, the replacement of the pitched front gable with a flat roof, along with other flat roof elements adjoining the front and side of the host dwelling, would harmfully disrupt the existing traditional cohesive roof form of the host dwelling, and would be highly visible in the streetscene. As a consequence, it would unduly draw the eye as an incongruous feature within the streetscene, contrasting harmfully and appearing entirely at odds with the character and appearance of the surrounding properties and detract from the significance of the CA.
10. The proposed garage would be sited in a prominent position forward of the front elevation. This, in itself, would not appear discordant, as several other properties have garages in similar positions. However, with the exception of the flat roof garage at Gorran Close, which is set to the side of the host property, back from the road and in a less prominent position, the garages all tend to feature pitched roofs reflecting the traditional roof forms of their respective host dwellings. The proposed flat roofed garage in a prominent position, would therefore appear as a highly incongruous form of development, at odds with the character of surrounding properties.
11. The Council has raised concern that the proposed front boundary treatment, consisting of a gate with piers and front hedging would diminish the existing open character of this part of the CA. However, many of the nearby properties have front boundary treatment similar to that proposed, which I find do not adversely affect the CA. Therefore, I consider this element of the proposal would be acceptable.
12. Given my findings above, the proposal would detract from the significance of the CA and have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the CA, which would neither be preserved nor enhanced, conflicting with section 72(1) of the PLBCAA.
13. Given the scale of the development within the context of the CA as a whole, I consider the harm would be less than substantial and towards the lower end of that spectrum of harm in this instance, but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. The Framework requires great weight be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of the level of potential harm.
14. Where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm, paragraph 215 of the Framework requires the harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
15. There would be some short-term economic benefits during the construction phase of the extension, but this would be limited and I afford it little weight. The proposal would incorporate energy saving features such as solar panels, this would be a modest environmental benefit due to the reduction in the consumption of energy.

There would be a social benefit with the proposal better meeting the needs of the occupiers, but this would be more of a private rather than public benefit.

16. The cumulative stated benefits would be limited and I attribute only minor weight to these in terms of public benefits which would not be sufficient to outweigh the weight attached to the harm I have found.
17. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA as a whole. It would conflict with the PLBCAA insofar as it relates to conservation areas, Policies 72 and 85 of the LP, the aims of which I have already set out and with Policy 69 of the LP which seeks development to take into account the surrounding context. It would also conflict with Policies ESD1 and ESD2 of the Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2033 which together, amongst other matters, require development to maintain or enhance the character of the area.
18. The development would also conflict with the provisions of the Framework where it seeks to ensure that development adds to the overall quality of the area, is sympathetic to local character and which seeks to conserve or enhance the historic environment.

Other Matter

19. I have considered the effect of the proposal upon the setting of nearby locally listed buildings to the rear of the appeal site and to the north and west of the site, further along West Common Grove. Due to the mature trees at the rear of the site and intervening buildings along West Common Grove, the setting of these nearby non-designated heritage assets would be unaffected.

Conclusion

20. 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 therefore dismissed.

T Bennett

INSPECTOR