The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 June 2022

by Rachel Hall BSc MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 July 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/D/21/3284427
2 The Hurstones, Hurstons Lane, Alton ST10 4AP

- 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 T Bland against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
- The application Ref SMD/2020/0600, dated 12 October 2020, was refused by notice dated 20 August 2021.
- The development proposed is extensions to front and rear of property to extend living kitchen and provide an additional bedroom. Also extension to rear of garage to provide garden room.

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for extensions to front and rear of property to extend living kitchen and provide an additional bedroom and extension to rear of garage to provide garden room at 2 The Hurstons, Hurstons Lane, Alton ST10 4AP in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref SMD/2020/0600, dated 12 October 2020, subject to the following conditions:

    1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.

    2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 20/605/03; 20/605/04; 20/605/06; and 20/605/07.

    3) The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used on the existing building.

Preliminary Matters

2. The site address in the heading above is taken from the original planning application form, although I note the spelling of The Hurstones and Hurstons Lane varies within the appeal documentation. The street sign is spelled 'The Hurstons'. I believe that to be the correct spelling and for consistency have used that spelling in this decision.

3. In addition to the two storey front extension, the proposal includes rear extensions to the existing house and its garage. On the evidence before me I am satisfied that the proposed rear extensions would be acceptable, without harm to the character or appearance of the site and surrounding area, or any other harm. The Council also found that the rear extensions would be

acceptable. Therefore, the proposed two storey front extension is the only matter in dispute between the main parties.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposed front extension would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Alton and Farley Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. The Hurstons (the road) is a residential road set behind Hurstons Lane. It is not a through road. The appeal building is one of three pairs of semi-detached houses described as mid-20th century brick cottages, that appear to have been constructed at a similar time, to a similar typology. Each house has a two storey front facing gable, projecting relatively close to the road edge, which is a defining feature of the character of the road. However, there are noticeable differences in the appearance of these houses from the road, where it appears that various front and side extensions have been constructed over time, of varying forms.

6. For example, No 5 has a two storey front facing gable that matches the scale of the original gable. The adjoining house has a conservatory style extension to the side that is highly visible from the road and the start of the adjacent public footpath that leads from Hurstons Lane towards Town Head. No 3 has a two storey extension with side facing gable and the adjoining house at No 4 has a single storey extension with a raked back roof. No 1 and the appeal building have single storey lean-to extensions, but with different roof materials. Despite this variation, and noting that some existing extensions were approved at a time when different local and national planning policies were in place, the repetition of the original front facing gable remains a common and defining feature in the street scene.

7. The road is relatively narrow, without pavements. In addition, there is limited space between front elevations and the road. As such, the front elevations of the cottages are not readily appreciable in a single view, other than in oblique views up or down the road. There are glimpsed views of individual houses between buildings from Hurstons Lane. However, from there, consistency between the appeal building and its neighbours is not easily identifiable or noticeable.

8. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires me to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Alton and Farley Conservation Area (the Conservation Area). The Conservation Area is comprised of three areas each with varying characteristics. The appeal site is located in the southern part, associated with the village of Alton and Alton Castle. Alton is a former market town, now a substantial village with a diverse range of buildings reflecting the historic development of the settlement and its varied topography. The Conservation Area spans a section of the Churnet Valley and incorporates Alton Towers and Alton Park as well as Farley Hall and its estate village. The significance of the Conservation Area as a whole lies in its architectural and historic interest.

9. The proposed front extension would match the height of the existing front facing gable, rather than being lower. However, it would be slightly recessed

from the building line of the existing gable. This would help to limit its dominance on the front elevation. It would also limit its visibility in views down the road and from the public footpath, where the existing gable would remain the dominant feature. The rhythm of this feature on houses along the road would be retained. Existing alterations to houses closer to the public footpath and junction with Hurstons Lane, such as Nos 5 and 6, are comparatively much more visible. Although the appeal house and its adjoining neighbour would not be symmetrical, given the constrained nature of the surroundings, any existing symmetry is not readily appreciable in any event.

10. The proposed materials would match existing. The design of the windows, their brick detailing and the placement of windows within the façade would also be consistent with that of the existing gable. Therefore, the proposal would complement the form of the existing building and the prominence of the existing gable feature would be retained. Consequently, the relatively discreet location of the appeal site, combined with the sympathetic design and choice of materials, would not detract from defining characteristics of houses on this road or the architectural and historic interest of the Conservation Area as a whole. Accordingly, the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

11. It would therefore accord with Policy SS1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (September 2020) (Local Plan) which sets out key principles for developments including maintaining the locally distinctive character of the towns and villages and their settings. It would also accord with Policy DC1 of the Local Plan which, amongst other matters, seeks to ensure proposals are well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness. It would further be in accordance with Policy DC2 of the Local Plan which seeks to conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets and ensure that proposals make a positive contribution to the character of the built and historic environment.

12. For the above reasons, the proposal would not conflict with relevant chapters of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) on achieving well-designed places and conserving and enhancing the historic environment. It would also broadly align with the aims of the Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide (Supplementary Planning Document) (February 2018) and Supplementary Planning Guidance 'Design Principles for Development in the Staffordshire Moorlands', which generally seek to ensure extensions harmonise with the existing building.

Conditions

13. The Council did not suggest conditions to be imposed in the event that the appeal were to be allowed. Therefore, in addition to the standard time limit condition I have imposed a condition specifying the approved plans, in the interests of certainty. For similar reasons, and to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, I have imposed a condition requiring materials to be used in the construction of external surfaces to match those on the existing building. This is to ensure the development integrates effectively with those elements of the existing building that will remain.

Conclusion

14. For the above reasons, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework and all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed subject to the conditions specified in this decision.

Rachel Hall

INSPECTOR