

Appeal Decision

Site visit made 25 July 2019

By Ruth Reed BA DipArch MA PGCertEd PPRIBA HonAIA FRIAS

An Independent Scheme of Management Inspector
Appointed by the Heritage Foundation Letchworth Garden City

Decision date 5 August 2019

Appeal Reference RR/2019/006

111 Norton Way South, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 1NY

- The appeal is made by [REDACTED] against refusal of consent under the Scheme of Management of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation for the application submitted on 8 January 2019.
 - Consent was refused by the Heritage Advisory Team on 31 January 2019. It was reviewed by the Advisory Management Committee on 7 March 2019 and the decision to refuse was upheld by the Housing Applications Committee 26 April 2019.
 - The development is ground floor rear extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal against refusal of the ground floor rear extension is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appellant describes the proposed development as a conservatory, the Heritage Foundation describe it as an extension. It would have a solid roof with four rooflights; two solid walls, with narrow flanking windows as it projects into the garden; and the gable elevation would be fully glazed with the exception of two plinth walls to the side-lights. The proposed development would be open to the main part of the house through an enlarged opening to the external kitchen wall.
3. Conservatories are generally highly glazed extensions that are separated from a house by external quality walls, doors or windows. The proposed development would be part of the house and the description 'ground floor extension' used by the Heritage Foundation is more accurate.
4. The decision is made in accordance with the Scheme of Management and the Design Principles. It is not made under any other legislation including planning, conservation and building regulations.

5. Other matters raised relating to the process of the application and the appeal, including the lack of discussion raised by the appellant, do not form part of my decision and should be referred to Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

Main Issue

6. The main issue in this case is the impact of the proposed extension on the property itself and the character of the area. The factors that contribute to this issue are the proposed form of the extension and the pitch of the roof, and the use of an artificial tile.

Reasons

7. 111 Norton Way South lies on the west side of the road and overlooks Howard Park to the east. It has residential properties to either side of a similar date and together they form part of a Heritage Character Area. To the rear, beyond the garden, are outbuildings and a tall brick wall that screen the property from a surface car park and the back of commercial properties in the town centre.
8. The property has been extended in the past to the side and rear with two-storey extensions. The proposal is for a single-storey rear extension to occupy the area of yard created by the existing rear extension. It is a matter of agreement that a well-designed extension would enhance this area of the house, however the Heritage Foundation have concerns about the form and the roofing material of the proposal now before me and it has been refused.
9. The proposed extension would have a gable roof of a shallower pitch than those on the main house with the apex just below the sill of the first-floor window. It would be slightly off-set from the line of the existing pitched roof and the centre of this window.
10. The Design Guidelines for Heritage Character Areas for rear extensions state that roof pitches should be consistent with the original roof design of the house. The appellant quotes the guidance for site extensions which allows for variations to this requirement if they do not damage the character and quality of the existing property and its context. The guidance for rear elevations does not allow for variations.
11. The orientation of the extension roof with a gable facing the garden is an acceptable form that would reflect the original house and its extensions. The shallow pitch would be acceptable if the extension was a fully-glazed conservatory. In which case the addition to the house would be viewed as a stand-alone element. However, the design of the proposal is part way between a conservatory and an extension and its relationship to the existing house, off-set from the line of the existing ridge is uncomfortable. As a consequence, the location and form of the proposed extension would have a negative effect on the appearance of the house itself.

12. The new extension would be concealed from the areas beyond the rear of the site, with the exception of limited views over the rear gate. The appellant drew my attention to commercial properties in the town centre visible from the car park to the rear of the site. These have shallower pitches, similar to that proposed on the house extension.
13. The proposed extension would not be viewed in the context of these commercial properties which have characteristics that are different to the domestic vernacular of the appeal site. Commercial architectural forms would not be appropriate on this domestic property and I do not consider these existing buildings to be a suitable precedent for the house extension.
14. Adjacent residential properties have rear extensions with a variety of roof pitches and orientations. These are partly visible from the garden of the appeal site. In the context of these, the appeal proposal would be another variant and no less acceptable than those already built.
15. As there is little opportunity to view the appeal proposal in the context of any other properties from outside the site, I have concluded that there would be limited harm to the surrounding area from the form of the extension and its roof pitch.
16. The roof material proposed is Superlite tile, a plastic tile laid in a staggered bond that would give a similar area of exposed surface to that of plain tiles. The tiles are part of a roofing system that is used for replacement conservatory roofs and for new-build installations. It was chosen by the appellant to minimise the roof construction depth, provide adequate thermal insulation, create a vaulted ceiling within the extension and be capable of being supported on the mullions of the windows.
17. The appellant considers that the minimal sight-lines at the corners of the windows are essential to the design of the extension and the enjoyment of views of the garden from within the house. He has chosen the lightweight system to achieve this and, he asserts, to give the appearance of a plain-tile roof to reflect the tiles on the original roof and existing extensions.
18. Plain tiles cannot be used on shallow pitches. It is therefore not possible for a shallow pitched roof in this location to meet the requirement of the Design Principles which require that the materials and detailing of the existing roof should be matched.
19. The suggested use of a plastic tile results from a design that mixes conservatory design and technologies with the requirements for the construction of an extension. The Design Principles can be met if the proposal is either a conservatory with a fully glazed roof or is an extension with a steep roof with plain tiles. Neither of these meet the appellant's objectives for the scheme.

20. The appellant asserts that the quality of the insurance-backed system is the modern equivalent of the traditional detailing elsewhere on the house. I disagree. The plastic will not age like a clay tiled roof and will always appear different from the existing roofs. It appears insubstantial and artificial in comparison to a clay tile roof. It would not protect the characteristic of the high quality of the materials used in the Heritage Character Area and meet the objectives of the Design Principles.
21. The Design Principles define the important characteristics of the Heritage Area as high quality of materials, workmanship and architectural features with strong influence from the Arts and Crafts Movement. Any application would need to ensure that these are protected and the quality of the setting preserved.
22. The artificial tile would not be visible from anywhere other than from the first-floor window of the property itself. The quality of the setting of the area would therefore be preserved. However, the proposed roof material is not of the high quality of materials and workmanship of Arts and Crafts detailing and use of this system on the extension roof would be detrimental to the property itself.
23. The Heritage Foundation have suggested other roof forms and finishing materials including an artificial lead finish. In reaching this conclusion I have not assessed alternative forms for the roof, neither have I concluded that modern materials are not suitable in all areas of Letchworth or that other modern materials would be unsuitable here. I have assessed just the appeal proposal in terms of the impact on the character and appearance of the property and the area, I do not have the remit to consider or propose other materials or architectural solutions.
24. It is concluded that, in terms of the Heritage Foundation's remit to preserve the character of the Garden City by the measures set out in the Design Principles, the proposed rear extension would preserve the character of the area but be detrimental to the property itself.

Conclusions

25. Having read the submissions and seen the site and its context I conclude that the extension would not be in accordance with the Design Principles. The appeal is dismissed.

Ruth Reed

Independent Scheme of Management Inspector