
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 March 2016

by C J Leigh BSc(Hons) MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 14th March 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/Q1445/D/15/3139064
19 Westdene Drive, Brighton, BN1 5HE

- 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 Jim and Rebecca Thomson against the decision of Brighton & Hove Borough Council.
 - The application Ref BH2015/02804, dated 30 July 2015, was refused by notice dated 7 October 2015.
 - The development proposed a loft conversion with extended gable end and rear dormer.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for a loft conversion with extended gable end and rear dormer at 19 Westdene Drive, Brighton, BN1 5HE in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref BH2015/02804, dated 30 July 2015, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building.
 - 3) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: WD/1, WD/2, WD/3, WD/4 & WD/5.

Main issue

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

Reasons

3. I saw at my site visit that a large number of properties in the vicinity of the appeal site have seen alterations to their roofs through the conversion of hipped ends to gables, front dormers and side dormers, and other roof alterations. This includes on Westdene Drive and also nearby streets, which I visited during my visit. Those changes have led to little diminishment to the character of this residential area, which is typified by mid 20th Century bungalows and housing set on sinuous roads that rise and fall with the undulating landscape, so meaning there is a varied building line and changes in the way in which properties and their roofs are seen. Such changes are part of, and do not diminish from, the generally pleasant overall character of the area.
 4. The appeal property is one half of a pair of bungalows that has hipped roofs. The proposals would see a gable end, and that would facilitate a dormer
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extension to the rear. Policy QD14 of the Brighton and Hove Local Plan states that planning permission will be granted for extensions and alterations to existing buildings if, amongst other matters, the proposed development is well designed, sited and detailed in relation to the property, adjoining properties and the surrounding area.

5. I have also been referred to the Council's Design Guide for Extensions and Alterations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 2013. This sets out a presumption against roof extensions that would alter the basic shape of a roof, including a change from hip to gable end, though it is also stated where there is an overwhelming majority of roofs to a pair, terrace or group of buildings that have been altered, then extensions may be permitted that seek to recreate some sense of unity and coherence. In such instances the SPD says a more flexible approach will be taken.
6. The proposals in this appeal would not be seeking to recreate an overall sense of unity or coherence. However, in this instance I am satisfied that the proposals would be suitable for the property and the area. As noted earlier, there are many roof alterations in the vicinity of the appeal site and this varied roof scape forms part of the character of the area. Due to the curve of the road and topography of the area there would be limited views of the altered roof, and in those views the overall balance of the house of the bungalow, and the pair of properties, would not be adversely affected. Thus, although the scheme would not accord with the detailed general design specifications of the SPD, I am therefore satisfied that the proposed change to a gable end would be an extension that is well designed, sited and detailed in relation to the property and the surrounding area, which is the key objective of the relevant development plan policy, namely Policy QD14.
7. A rear dormer window is then proposed on this altered roof form. This would not be the full width or height of the building, and so would not appear as an additional storey. I note that the SPD, though, does seek to ensure dormers are kept as small as possible and to be a subordinate addition to the roof. The SPD also seeks to ensure that the supporting structure for a dormer is kept to a minimum, with no large areas of cladding either side of the window or below. In this instance I again consider it important to consider the character of the area within which the dormer is proposed. As noted, there are many alterations to roofs in the area, with a variety of dormer window designs on front, rear and side elevations that are visible from the street due to the steeply sloping land levels.
8. As the appellants point out, the proposal at No. 19 would in fact have very limited visibility due to the steep slope in land to the rear of the property. In the limited views that would occur the scale, position and design of the dormer would not be out of character with the area, and would not dominate the property or the pair of buildings. The modified dwelling – with both the gable roof and the rear dormer – would thus appear in scale with the property, and would not be intrusive to the street. The key objective of the relevant development plan Policy QD14 would therefore again be met.
9. In my judgement there would not be an excessive number of rooflights on the front elevation. They would be sited in an unobtrusive fashion on the roof slope, having regard to the character of the property having large windows on the raised ground floor that dominate the front of the building. There would not be any conflict with the guidance in the SPD or the objectives of Policy QD14.

10. For the reasons given it is therefore my opinion that the particular circumstances of this case indicate that the proposed development would be appropriate to the host property and the character and appearance of the surrounding area. Thus, the proposals would satisfy the requirements of the development plan, and by responding to the local area the proposals would also be consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework that requires good design.
11. For the reasons given, and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is therefore allowed. A condition is necessary requiring matching materials to ensure a satisfactory appearance to the development, and a further condition specifying the approved drawings, for the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning

C J Leigh

INSPECTOR

