



# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 December 2012

by **C Tokley MRTPI**

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

**Decision date: 17 December 2012**

**Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/D/12/2185342**

**Little Paddocks, Woolhampton Hill, Woolhampton, Reading, RG7 5SY**

- 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 Andrew and Rebecca Robinson against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
- The application Ref 12/01144/HOUSE was refused by notice dated 5 September 2012.
- The development proposed is:- Flat roofed single storey extensions removed, 2 storey extensions, single storey garden room and new pitched roof garage added.

## Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

## Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the dwelling and the surrounding area.

## Reasons

3. Little Paddocks is a detached dwelling set within a scatter of houses that mainly occupy large plots in partly-wooded countryside. The site is outside the settlement boundary of Woolhampton and is close to the crest of a hill that rises from the south affording extensive views from rear of the house and garden across the Kennet Valley. The eastern side boundary of the site is partly bounded by a dense evergreen hedge; however beyond the rear of the dwelling the hedge becomes more open allowing clear views of the house from the public footpath that runs along the boundary and separates the garden from school playing fields that lie to the east.
4. When approached along Woolhampton Road from the north, down the hill, Little Paddocks is partly screened by trees and hedges. At the time of my site visit the upper floor and roof of the house were in view as skyline features between the deciduous trees. I am conscious that when in leaf the trees would provide a greater degree of screening but for a substantial part of the year the house is visible from Woolhampton Road.
5. The original dwelling has been extended at both ground- and first-floor level and now comprises a central two storey section with single-storey flat-roofed elements on each side. The proposal would reduce the overall width of the building on the ground floor but the two storey extensions would extend the first floor at both sides of the house introducing two small gables into the front elevation, one on each side of the existing full-height central gable.

6. The floor area of the original dwelling, built in 1960, was 154 sq m and the appellants indicate that the original development included the 2 bay garage resulting in a building of about 235 sq m. Soon after the house was built a 1961 single storey extension increased the floor area to about 360 sq m and later additions (indicated by the appellants to date from 1978 and 1992) have resulted in the 451 sq m current dwelling. Based on the original house and garages the floor area of the original structure on the site has almost doubled. The proposal would result in an overall floor area of 569 sq m which represents an increase of about 240% as compared with the original.
7. "Saved" Policy ENV.24 of the *West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006* (LP) (Extensions to dwellings in the countryside) seeks to prevent material increases in visual intrusion into the countryside and the over-development of residential sites. It sets out criteria for the consideration of proposals to extend dwellings and indicates that extended dwellings should not be disproportionate to the original dwelling. Guidance on the interpretation of this policy is provided by the Council's July 2004 Supplementary Planning Guidance: *Replacement dwellings and extensions to dwellings in the countryside* (SPG). Both the LP Policy and the SPG pre-date the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) by some years. However the objectives of Policy ENV.24 are consistent with one of the core planning principles of the Framework which is the recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. I therefore give it full weight.
8. As regards dwellings built after 1 July 1948 the SPG defines "original" as the size of the dwelling as built excluding any subsequent extensions or outbuildings. It states that increases in floorspace of less than 50% as compared with the original dwelling are unlikely to be considered to be disproportionate on size increase alone; however it indicates that floorspace is only one factor in the determination of whether an extension is disproportionate. Nevertheless the total floorspace proposed at Little Paddocks would exceed the 50% guidance by a factor of almost 5 and this is an indicator that the proposal would be likely to be disproportionate.
9. The SPG recognises that where an original dwelling is relatively small larger percentage increases may be necessary to bring the house up to modern living standards. The appellants argue that the appeal dwelling is small in relation to its large plot; however the extensions now proposed are not necessary to provide modern facilities and any original deficiency could have been overcome by the extensions already carried out.
10. The SPG also indicates that, in exceptional circumstances, where a previous extension is long-established, a modest further extension may be acceptable, provided that it would not have a harmful effect on the character of the countryside. The 1961 extension was carried out shortly after the construction of the dwelling and may be regarded as "well established"; however in my view the 1978 and 1992 additions do not fall within the same category. Even if they were considered to be "well established" the proposal would represent an increase in floor area of about 25% and I consider that this, combined with the increase in the bulk of the building as now proposed, could not be considered to be a "modest" extension. I therefore consider that as regards floorspace the proposal would be a disproportionate addition and would not fall within the "exceptions" to the size guidelines set out in the SPG.

11. The ridge of the proposed western extension would be set down from the existing roof line by 300 mm; however the two-storey extensions would significantly increase the bulk of the dwelling when seen both from the footpath and Woolhampton Road. The single-story rear extension would be less prominently visible but it would add further to the bulk of the dwelling as compared both with the original house and the existing dwelling. The appellants point out that part of the rear extension could be built as "permitted development" however it forms part of the proposal before me.
12. Taking an overview I consider that as regards floorspace, the overall size and massing of the dwelling as extended and its effect on the inherent character of the area the proposal would represent a disproportionate addition as defined by the SPG and that the proposal would conflict with LP Policy ENV.24.
13. The appellants draw attention to the amendments made to the proposal following an appeal decision dated 2 December 2011 (ref APP/W0340/D/11/2160600). However I consider that those amendments would not materially reduce the bulk of the proposal as compared with that the subject of that appeal. The appellants point out that when determining the previous application the Council incorrectly identified the site as being within the *North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (AONB) and that the Inspector determine the appeal on that basis. The Framework restates the highest status of protection that should be afforded to AONB countryside; however this does not detract from the need to take account of the intrinsic character of all of the countryside.
14. The appellants set out the overall design concept of the proposal which in my view would create a remodelled dwelling as opposed to an "extended" dwelling. I do not share the Council's concern that the extensions would not be subservient and I consider that the elevational treatment of the building would be acceptable. The proposed construction and energy efficiency measures would contribute to the sustainability of the dwelling and I am also conscious that the development would, in a small way, contribute to the health of the building industry in the area. However the concept of sustainability includes an environmental dimension and I consider that the positive factors are not sufficient to outweigh the harm that would be caused to the character and appearance of the area as a result of the increased bulk of the dwelling.
15. The appellants indicate that "Hillbrow" which lies to the north of the appeal site, has recently been redeveloped with its floorspace being more than doubled. I do not have the full details of that proposal but I note that the original bungalow on that site was much smaller than the appeal dwelling. I saw that Hillbrow is more prominent than Little Paddocks but its redevelopment does not convince me that the appeal proposal is acceptable.
16. I consider that the proposal would conflict with LP Policy ENV.24 and with the Council's July 2012 Core Strategy (CS) which indicates in Policy CS14 that new development must respect and enhance the character and appearance of the area within which it is located.

#### *Other matters*

17. Refusal reason 2 refers to CS Policy CS16 (Flooding) but there is no evidence to support this reference. The appellants ask that I comment on the processes of the Council and the accountability of Council Officers; however those are

matters for the appellants to pursue with the Council and are beyond the scope of my Decision.

**Conclusion**

18. Taking account of all matters I conclude that the proposal would unacceptably detract from the character and appearance of the area and that the appeal should not succeed.

*Clive Tokley*

INSPECTOR