Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 June 2025

by Andrew Dale BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 June 2025

Appeal Ref. APP/H0520/D/25/3361767
14 Spinney Lane, Alconbury, Huntingdon PE28 4EB

- 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 Michael Peters against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
- The application ref. is 24/02087/HHFUL.
- The development proposed is: "*Front single storey extension including new lean-too (sic) roof over new extension and over existing flat roof. Rear first floor extension over existing single storey. Monocouche render to existing house*."

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The description of the proposal in the heading above is taken from the Council's decision notice and the planning appeal form. It closely follows the description of the proposed works provided on the application form and I note that "*Monocouche render to existing house*" appeared on all 3 documents.

3. Within the context of an appeal under section 78 of the Act, it is not within my remit to formally determine whether applying monocouche render to the existing house would not require planning permission as advanced by the appellant. I do not therefore intend to remove this part of the proposal from the description of the proposed works as requested by the appellant. However, I go on to consider the evidence as to whether planning permission is required so far as it is material to this appeal under the first main issue. If the appellant wishes to formally ascertain whether this aspect of the development is or would be lawful, he may make an application to the Council in the first instance under section 191 or 192 of the Act.

Main issues

4. The main issues are the effects of the proposal upon the character and identity of the area and upon the amenity of the residents at 3 Hawthorn End, with particular regard to the potential for overlooking and loss of privacy.

Reasons

5. Insofar as the character and identity of the area are concerned, the sole objection of the Council related to the proposed rendering of the dwelling.

6. No. 14 is a detached 2-storey house situated on the southern side of Spinney Lane. It is one of 5 detached houses (nos 12-20) in a row between Spinney Lane's junctions with Hawthorn End and Elm End. Along with an area of public open space on the northern side of Spinney Lane, this row provides the immediate context and setting for the appeal property.

7. Even though the locality does not possess any outstanding examples of urban architecture, this is nonetheless a pleasant residential area which is characterised by brick-built houses with various forms of cladding across large sections of the front elevations above ground floor level. There are slight variations in the colour of the bricks, but they are predominantly buff coloured. The front cladding treatments do vary, for example from red hanging tiles at no. 20 to pebbledash at no. 18, to stone cladding at no. 16, to white plastic boarding at the appeal property and to light grey composite cladding at no. 12. However, at the front of these houses, the end columns are consistently of brickwork. So too are the rear and side elevations. The brickwork columns at the front provide a distinctive frame for the cladding.

8. Whilst I saw that render is a traditional finish when viewing the district as a whole, at the host property it has only been used on a very small section of ground floor walling below the kitchen window. It is not clear if this material was part of the original dwelling. The appellant has not pointed to any properties in Spinney Lane which are fully rendered, with or without sections of cladding. The consistent use of brick with panels is a key element in the character and identity of the host property and other houses nearby. This lends a sense of coherence to the locality.

9. The front elevation and eastern gable end of no. 14 are prominent in views from Spinney Lane and the public open space. Its rear elevation is quite noticeable in public views from Hawthorn End and in private views from the back gardens of several nearby residential properties.

10. The proposal is to render the walls of the house and the extensions, apart from the renewal of the cladding on the upper front elevation over a reduced surface area and the use of cladding for the first floor rear extension. As the Council says, all reference to the brick material would be lost. Whilst applying a buff coloured render might minimize any contrast in colour, I consider the use of render to be unacceptable in principle as it would not sufficiently replicate the varied shading, pattern, texture and pointing of the brickwork and because render is neither a widely used walling material within this area nor is it found on the front columns.

11. Whilst the proposed cladding finishes would not be objectionable, the rendered walls would appear prominently at odds with the original host building and the other nearby houses and would diminish the sense of coherence that enhances the visual amenities of the street scene. New development should fit harmoniously with its surroundings. Instead, the proposal would not be sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and would dilute the sense of place provided by the consistency of the established palette and arrangements of brick materials with cladding.

12. I note the appellant's commentary on The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. The rendering of the existing dwelling could amount to permitted development under Schedule 2, Part 1, Class A but that is subject to conditions, the first one of which at A.3 (a) is directly relevant.

This states that the materials used in any exterior work (other than materials used in the construction of a conservatory) must be of a similar appearance to those used in the construction of the exterior of the existing dwellinghouse.

13. This condition is intended to ensure that any works to enlarge, alter or improve a house result in an appearance that minimises visual impact and is sympathetic to existing development. The appellant has not explained how rendering the house, in whatever colour, would produce a result that would be of a similar appearance to the bricks used in the construction of the exterior of the existing dwelling. This limits the weight I attach to the claim made by the appellant but my observation is for the purposes of the current appeal only and does not in any way prejudice the formal consideration of any future application for a lawful development certificate.

14. I find on the **first main issue** that the proposal would harm the character and identity of the area. As the development, in terms of its materials of construction, would not achieve a high standard design, would not contribute positively to its context including the area's character and identity and would fail to successfully integrate with adjoining buildings, there would be conflict with the aims of Policies LP 11 and LP 12 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036.

15. Turning to the second main issue, the surrounding built environment and back gardens on Spinney Lane, Hawthorn End and Elm End can be fairly described as being quite compact. The open spaces within the rear gardens are modest. It would appear that only ground floor rear extensions have been added in the row of houses between 12-20 Spinney Lane, including at nos 14, 16 and 18.

16. Any future occupiers of the enlarged bedroom that would be created by the proposed first floor extension over the existing single storey rear extension would have commanding views rearwards from an elevated level down into the rear garden of 3 Hawthorn End. Some of the overlooking from that habitable room would be across fairly short distances. There would be only 6.75m of separation distance between that rear bedroom window and the common boundary fence.

17. The existing rear-facing first floor bedroom windows of the appeal property are clearly set further back from the common boundary. Moreover, the sizeable shed in the rear garden of the appeal property does have some mitigating effect on the views available from them over the rear garden of 3 Hawthorn End. On the other hand, the shed would be unlikely to similarly obstruct the views available from the proposed first floor rear extension. Whilst 16 and 18 Spinney Lane are closer to their respective common boundaries with 3 Hawthorn End and 2 Elm End, that only applies to their floor plans at ground floor level. I noted a window in the opposing northern side gable of 3 Hawthorn End adjacent to the common boundary with the appeal property but I believe this serves a stairway and/or landing which are non-habitable areas of the dwelling. Even if that is not the case, unacceptable overlooking in one instance would not justify the creation of another example.

18. The appeal scheme would result in a more invasive sense of overlooking compared to the existing situation. Sizeable first floor rear extensions like this, in a situation where they are not common features in the row of houses between 12-20 Spinney Lane, would create a much more intrusive feel and the disturbing psychological perception of being overlooked. The actual and perceived loss of privacy for the occupiers of 3 Hawthorn End would be unacceptable.

19. The surrounding residential environment is not conducive to the proposed rear first floor extension in the circumstances of this particular case. I find on the **second main issue** that the proposal would be harmful to the amenity of the residents at 3 Hawthorn End, with particular regard to the potential for overlooking and loss of privacy. The proposal would thus conflict with Policy LP 14 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 which requires new developments to maintain a high standard of amenity for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings, including ensuring that the physical relationships arising from the design and separation of buildings will not result in overlooking causing loss of privacy.

Concluding comments

20. I have studied the appellant's commentary upon the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Design Guide (NDG). It is the case that most proposals to extend residential properties will reflect some of their aims when read as a whole. However, good design is a cornerstone of the NPPF and the NDG and a key aspect of sustainable development. I consider that the proposal is ill-judged in design terms. It would not achieve a well-designed place as sought by those national guidance documents.

21. The Council raised no objections in relation to the amenities of any other neighbouring occupiers or to parking provision and vehicle movements. I see no reason to take a different stance. Still, my findings on the main issues are decisive to the outcome of this appeal. There is conflict with the development plan. The harm cannot be mitigated by the imposition of planning conditions and it is not outweighed by other material considerations, including the absence of objections from local residents and the Parish Council and the benefits the extra habitable accommodation and bathrooms would provide for the living arrangements of the appellant and his family.

22. For the reasons given above and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that this appeal should not succeed.

Andrew Dale

INSPECTOR