

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 October, 2016

by C. Jack, BSc(Hons) MA MA(TP) MRTPI

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

Decision date: 12th October, 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/Z3825/W/16/3153292

3 Fairfield Cottages, Cowfold, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 8BL

- 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 Mrs Sharon Awcock against the decision of Horsham District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/16/0444, dated 27 January 2016, was refused by notice dated 18 April 2016.
 - The development proposed is the part demolition of number 3, construction of new attached dwelling, and provision of revised parking arrangements.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, including the adjacent Cowfold Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. 3 Fairfield Cottages (No 3) is a two-storey semi-detached house with a detached garage adjacent to the side boundary, beyond which there is a public footpath to the village centre. The site lies within the defined built up area of Cowfold and the designated Cowfold Conservation Area (CCA) lies immediately beyond the rear garden of No 3. A variety of houses can be seen in the vicinity, which is predominantly residential in character, of which Fairfield Cottages has a more defined character of mainly similar pairs of semi-detached houses, which are laid out with a fairly regular rhythm. Cowfold Playing Fields are situated opposite the appeal site.
 4. It is proposed to demolish the existing single-storey accommodation, which is set under a cat slide roof, and to replace it with a two-storey house attached to No 3, thereby resulting in a terrace of three dwellings. The new house would be wider at the rear than at the front due to the triangular nature of the site as it responds to the route of the adjacent footpath. There would be a single-storey element at the rear of the new house, which would project a little further rearward than the existing conservatory at No 3. Two parking spaces would be provided for the new house, using the existing crossover, and two new parking spaces would be provided for No 3, which would require a new crossover onto the road involving the partial removal of the front hedge and the re-siting of a street lighting column.
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5. I note that some elements of the proposed design would reflect the general character and detailing of No 3, including the continuation of the brick soldier course, the height of the main ridge and eaves, the size and level of fenestration, and the proposed matching of materials. However, the width of the front elevation would be notably narrower than Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 Fairfield Cottages due to the limitations of the width of the plot at this point. The elongated and hipped roof would also be significantly at odds with the cat slide roofs that are currently a feature of Numbers 1 to 4. This would create a cramped and unbalanced appearance, particularly with No 4, which would form the other end of the terrace, where the cat slide roof would remain a notable feature.
6. I note that the side elevation of the proposed new house has been set in a little from the public footpath in comparison to a previous scheme put to the Council. Nevertheless, there would be a two-storey elevation positioned close to this side boundary, which would give the new house a significantly more cramped appearance compared to other properties in Fairfield Cottages. This would be accentuated because the area in front of the new house, at the narrowest part of the site, would be dominated by the proposed parking spaces, whereas nearby properties in the road generally have parking provision towards the side of the plot and a garden area in front of the house itself, giving a more spacious feel.
7. These concerns are principally in relation to the character and appearance of the development. The proposed new house and No 3 would each be provided with adequate rear garden space to meet the likely needs for private amenity space arising from the scale of the proposed development, which would therefore not be 'cramped' in that respect. Furthermore, the footpath would also ensure reasonable visual separation from No 2, but this would not overcome the cramped and unbalanced appearance of the new house in relation to its plot size, the side boundary and the attached neighbouring properties.
8. For these reasons, I find that size and design of the proposed development, particularly in relation to the plot size and the character of nearby properties, would have a cramped, unbalanced and therefore incongruous appearance in the street scene.
9. I note that there is an existing terrace of properties in nearby Fairfield Court; however this is essentially end-on to Fairfield Cottages and the principle elevation of Fairfield Court faces across a small green open space towards the main road. As a result, Fairfield Court would not be read to any significant degree in the street scene with the proposed development and accordingly it does not add any significant weight in favour of the proposed development.
10. I also note the small-scale commercial development immediately on the rear boundary of the site, which is of a significantly different character to Fairfield Cottages and situated within the CCA. However, there would be a reasonable degree of separation between the new house and the commercial buildings such that there would be no significant adverse interrelationship arising from the proposed development. While this does not add any significant weight in favour of the proposed development, the position of the commercial buildings would partially screen the new house from the CCA and thereby reduce its effect on the CCA, a designated heritage asset.

11. I conclude that the proposed development would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the area. Accordingly, it would conflict with Policies 32 and 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework 2015 (HDPF), which seek to ensure high quality development that, amongst other things, complements locally distinctive character and accords with general development principles including that the scale, massing and appearance of the development relates sympathetically with the built surroundings. However, I find no direct conflict with Policy 25 of the HDPF, which relates to the natural environment and landscape character.
12. Accordingly, I further conclude that the proposed development would have an adverse impact on the setting of the adjacent CCA, contrary to the expectations of the Framework and Policy 32 of the HDPF, which also seeks to ensure that new development complements the heritage of the district. However, I would quantify the extent of this harm as being less than substantial when considered in the context of Paragraphs 133 and 134 of the Framework. Nonetheless, such harm needs to be balanced against any public benefits the development might bring, and I consider these below.

Other Matters

13. I acknowledge that there would be a number of benefits of the proposed development, in particular that it would result in one additional dwelling within the defined built up area. Other associated benefits include that it would make more efficient use of the site and that the increased proximity of the side entrance may result in improved surveillance of the footpath. As a single dwelling, these benefits would be modest but I have afforded them some weight in favour of the proposed development. However, this does not outweigh the harm I have identified above.
14. The Council has previously refused a similar proposal Ref DC/15/2578 for a new attached dwelling and a single storey rear extension to No 3. The appellant considers the appeal proposal to overcome the Council's previous concerns. I acknowledge that the appeal scheme represents some reduction in scale compared to the previous scheme considered by the Council.
15. The Council has also previously permitted a two-storey and single-storey side extension to No 3 for occupation by a dependent relative Ref DC/04/2247, which was somewhat smaller and of a notably different design to the scheme before me, such that it would have read as an extension to No 3 rather than a new dwelling. The Council has also granted a Lawful Development Certificate Ref DC/16/0450 for a proposed single storey rear extension to No 3. Notwithstanding, I have found nothing in these three decisions by the Council that is of sufficient weight to alter my findings above in relation to the main issue and moreover, I have considered the proposal before me on its own merits.
16. My attention has been drawn to a previous appeal decision Ref APP/Z3825/W/15/3014447 relating to Viscount House, which is situated on The Street, Cowfold, roughly to the rear of No 3. This scheme relates to the conversion of a Grade II listed building in the CCA from offices to residential, conversion of a stable block to residential, and the erection of a new 2 bed dwelling. The nature and circumstances of that appeal differ significantly from the case before me, not least because the decision was made prior to the

adoption of the HDPF, and again I have found nothing in the previous decision of sufficient weight to alter my findings above.

Conclusion

17. For these reasons, and having had regard to all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Catherine Jack

INSPECTOR