
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 November 2016

by S M Holden BSc MSc CEng MICE TPP FCIHT MRTPI

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

Decision date: 22nd November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/Z3825/W/16/3155180
2 Plough Lane, Horsham RH12 5TN

- 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 Christopher Royce against the decision of Horsham District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/16/0803, dated 8 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 3 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is a new 3 bed detached house.
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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.

Reasons

3. Plough Lane lies within a residential area of Horsham characterised by detached and link-detached two-storey houses in modestly proportioned plots. The houses are set back from the street and have small front gardens, but the absence of boundary treatments throughout much of the area gives it an open and spacious appearance.
 4. The appeal site is an area of land to the side of No 2 Plough Lane, which occupies a plot that is significantly larger than those associated with the other properties on the south side of Plough Lane. Part of the site is within the garden of No 2; the remainder forms an area of grass that wraps around its front and side. I understand that the site was originally intended to be developed when the estate was built in late 1970s, but this was prevented due to the presence of a protected oak tree, which has subsequently been felled when it became diseased.
 5. Although a significant proportion of the site is currently enclosed by a substantial laurel hedge, it occupies a prominent and highly visible corner position at the junction with Thatchers Close. It is one of only a few undeveloped areas within the overall layout of the estate that provides visual relief from the built form and gives the area a sense of openness. When seen alongside a similar area adjacent to No 2 Thatchers Close, it therefore makes a positive contribution to the character of the area.
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6. A two-storey dwelling on the site, which would project beyond the rear elevation of the parent property, would introduce a tall and bulky building onto this sensitive site, which would be seen by anyone travelling along Plough Lane. As a consequence there would be an unacceptable loss of openness on this highly visible corner plot. This would be the case, notwithstanding the retention of the existing grass verge and the possibility of retaining or replacing a significant section of the existing laurel hedge.
7. The appellant has suggested that the appeal site can be compared with that occupied by No 12. However, that house is set back from the street, faces the turning head of the cul-de-sac and is immediately adjacent to a short terrace of houses accessed along a footpath. In my view, it is therefore quite different from, and not comparable with, the prominent and exposed position of the appeal site within the street scene.
8. The development within the estate exhibits considerable uniformity of key features, with only a limited number of designs being repeated in different streets. All the houses have pitched roofs. Whilst some are linked by pitched roof garages, others have a partially integrated garage that projects beyond the front elevation. There is a common palette of materials, with groups of houses constructed of either red or buff bricks. Where a group of houses share the same basic design, they also have identical fenestration patterns. All these factors contribute to the sense of cohesion within the estate as a whole.
9. The proposed dwelling would respect the building line along Plough Lane. The gap between it and No 2 would be sufficient to provide for a garage and a parking space on the driveway. However, the design of the dwelling would present a gable end facing the street, which would be at odds with the pitched roof of the remainder of the group on this side of Plough Lane. Furthermore, the elevation fronting Plough Lane would be significantly narrower than those of the group and would include a bay window but no front entrance. In my view this alignment of the dwelling, with its pitched roof facing Thatchers Close, would fail to respect the form and repetitive design features of the group of dwellings in Plough Lane. It would therefore appear incongruous and out of keeping with the adjacent development.
10. The elevation facing Thatchers Close would include the front door and windows at both ground and first floor level. On my site visit I saw that the other houses occupying corner plots cited by the appellant were predominantly characterised by a plain flank wall closest to the footway, with no doors and only minimal secondary windows. Unlike the existing houses, the proposed dwelling would have no porch, but its front entrance would be close to the back of the footway, rather than set back and approached via a front garden and driveway. It therefore seems to me that the proposal would appear alien in the street scene, as it would fail to respect the established pattern of development and the key design features of the dwellings in the surrounding area. I am not persuaded that the use of matching materials would mitigate the harm arising from these more fundamental design issues.
11. The appellant drew my attention to a proposal for a detached dwelling in Crawley Road, Ref: DC/14/0048. However, although that site is a corner plot, the surrounding context is significantly different. That scheme is therefore not comparable with the appeal proposal, which I have determined on its individual planning merits, having regard to the particular circumstances of the site.

12. Taking all these factors into consideration, I conclude that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, as a consequence of its incongruous design and its adverse effect on the open character of the estate. It would be contrary to Policies 25, 32 and 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework, which seek to protect townscape character and require new development to respect its setting and relate sympathetically to the existing built surroundings.

Conclusion

13. The Government is seeking to significantly boost the supply of housing and requires applications for housing development to be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. The appeal site is within the built up area boundary of Horsham, which is considered to be a sustainable location for new housing.
14. The provision of an additional house would make efficient use of land and contribute, albeit in a minor way, towards the achievement of the Council's identified housing requirements and target for development on windfall sites. It would be constructed to high standards of thermal efficiency, access and parking arrangements would be satisfactory and the proposal would not adversely affect the living conditions of occupants of any adjacent dwellings. However, these positive aspects of the scheme are insufficient to overcome the significant harm I have identified to the character and appearance of the area.
15. For this reason, and having regard to all other relevant matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR