
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 January 2017

by Patrick Whelan BA(Hons) Dip Arch MA MSc ARB RIBA RTPI

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

Decision date: 17th February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/T0355/W/16/3161016

Sandhills, Cross Road, Sunningdale, Ascot SL5 9RU

- 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 Michael Smith against the decision of the Council of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
 - The application Ref 16/01127, dated 1 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 July 2016.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of 2 existing dwellings and associated garaging and the construction of 2 new houses with associated landscaping and garaging.
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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 of the area.

Reasons

3. Given that there are two dwellings on this site, the Council's objection to the plot widths of the sub-divided plot being smaller than the surrounding plots is largely academic. Notwithstanding this, the diminutive footprints and varying heights of the buildings on the site, together with the space retained between them and between them and the enclosing roads make a significant contribution to the spacious, green, and sylvan character of the surrounding area.
 4. The gap between the proposed houses would be smaller than that between the houses on many of the neighbouring plots; however, given that the plot is already occupied by two dwellings, the gap proposed is quite reasonable. The height of the proposed houses would reflect many of the houses in the surrounding plots, and the site coverage of the proposed development would not be dissimilar to the Coach House to the west.
 5. However, the site coverage would be far higher than the plots to the north, south, and east of the site, which are more representative of the plots in the area, and which share a coherent, scale, pattern, and density of development. The front building line of the proposed houses would be set further forward of the more characteristic front building lines in this part of Cross Road and Ridgemount Road, which would exacerbate the divergence of the proposed
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- development from the more spacious context of the surrounding area. The resulting effect would be a development which crowds its street boundaries, with uncharacteristically high site coverage, at odds with the prevailing pattern of development in the area.
6. The Council is critical of the formality of the design of the houses and their similarity, and I acknowledge that the architectural character of the area leans more to forms and details of more informal and asymmetric influence than proposed here. However, I saw examples of formally arranged buildings in the area, in which context a formal design approach would not be out of place.
 7. I acknowledge that there are differences between the proposed houses, which share a common, architectural language and materials. However, the effect of the similarity between their footprints, massing, and heights, and in such proximity to one another and to the street, would result in an uncharacteristic prominence in the street scene. Their similarity would do little to add interest or character to the distinctive townscape of the area which is typified by the idiosyncrasy of house design on individual plots.
 8. I have taken into account the housing to the west of the site but consider, because of the existing site coverage, building lines and space around buildings, that the appeal site has greater affinity with the character of development to the north, south, and east. I appreciate that the existing buildings are of a similar style, however, their scale, footprints and siting are distinctly different whereas the proposed houses would have a comparable scale, footprint and siting.
 9. Given the present parking areas on site which are extensive and that the Council does not object to the proposed garaging, I see no conflict with Policy NP/DG3.3 of the Ascot, Sunninghill & Sunningdale Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2026 (NP) which concerns parking. Similarly, without evidence to the contrary, I see no conflict from the type and size of accommodation proposed with NP Policy NP/H2.1.
 10. I conclude however, that because of the site coverage of the houses and their proximity to the streets, the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character of the area. It would be in conflict with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Local Plan (Incorporating Alterations) 2003 saved Policies H11 and DG1. These say, amongst other things, that new buildings should be compatible with the established street façade, having regard to the building lines of adjacent properties and that development which would introduce a scale or density which would be incompatible with the character of the area, will not be permitted. It would also be contrary to NP Policies NP/DG1.1, NP/DG1.6, NP/DG2.2, and NP/DG3.1 which require development amongst other things, to respond positively to local townscape, respect established building lines, and enhance the character of the local area.
 11. It would also be at odds with the advice in paragraphs 58 and 64 of the National Planning Policy Framework which set out that decisions should ensure that developments establish a strong sense of place, respond to local character, and take the opportunity to improve the character and quality of an area. Additionally it would fail to accord with the Planning Practice Guidance which advises that development should seek to promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development.

Other Matters

12. Whilst I have considered concerns from neighbours including in relation to the impact of the proposal on their living conditions, given my findings on the main issue above, these have not led me to a different overall conclusion.
13. While the Council is unable to provide a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites, and there may be a shortfall in housing supply, which would mean that policies for the supply of housing would not be up-to-date, the development plan policies referred to by the Council relate to the quality of development rather than strictly to the supply of housing. I therefore accord significant weight to these policies, which I consider to be up-to-date.
14. In any event, the proposal does not adequately address the environmental role of sustainable development as set out in paragraph 7 of the Framework, and does not therefore constitute sustainable development. Even if the policies referred to above were considered to relate to housing supply, which I consider they do not, I find that the adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development.

Conclusion

15. In summary, whilst the development would provide additional living space, this is outweighed by the harm it would cause to the character of the area and the conflict with the policies of the development plan. For the reasons given above, and taking account of all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Patrick Whelan

INSPECTOR