

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 February 2017

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: 21 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/H2265/W/16/3163925

3 Greenwood Place, Wrotham, Sevenoaks TN15 7RG

- 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 Connelly against the decision of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.
 - The application Ref TM/16/02645/FL, dated 26 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 27 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is sub-division of the garden to No 3 Greenwood Place and the construction of a new dwelling with a new access off St Mary's Road.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether or not the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wrotham Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is currently part of the garden of No 3 Greenwood Place. It lies entirely within the Wrotham Conservation Area. In assessing the proposal I therefore have a duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that Area. As heritage assets are irreplaceable any harm or loss requires clear and convincing justification. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that any harm which is less than substantial must be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal.
 4. The village of Wrotham is centred on the High Street which is characterised by a variety of historic buildings. The Conservation Area extends from this central area southwards along the full length of St Marys Road. Here development is more mixed in character. The eastern side of the street is predominantly comprised of modern, detached two-storey dwellings. The western side has a greater proportion of older properties and includes the large and imposing Masonic Hall, whose car park lies immediately to the north of the appeal site. However, the southernmost section is narrow and enclosed by trees and a mature hedge which gives the lane a more rural character.
 5. Greenwood Place is a short cul-de-sac. It appears to be an infill development that occupies an area of land to the east of Borough Green Road. It comprises a series of substantial detached houses set in well-proportioned plots. Although the houses lie outside the Conservation Area, its boundary goes
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through No 3's garden. The proposal seeks to construct a chalet bungalow in that part of the garden that lies within the Conservation Area. It would be accessed by a new driveway in St Marys Road.

6. The area in and around this part of the Conservation Area is characterised by its spaciousness. The buildings are well set back from the street and there is a notable absence of development that relates to St Marys Road on the western side of its southern end. The proposed dwelling would occupy a plot that would be smaller than those in the immediate surrounding area, although the evidence presented demonstrated that there are plots of comparable size elsewhere in the village and on the opposite side of St Marys Road. However, unlike most of the houses in the area, the proposal would not face the street. Instead it would have its front elevation on the northern side looking out on the driveway and its flank elevation facing the roadside boundary vegetation. This sideways orientation with the street would fail to respect the more traditional relationship between dwellings with their immediate surroundings that is found elsewhere in the village.
7. Its rear garden, although adequate in width and overall size, would be shallow because of the need to provide sufficient space for parking and turning vehicles on the north side of the house. I consider this arrangement would result in the dwelling appearing cramped on the site. The proposal would also substantially reduce the garden of the parent property, making it appear out of scale with its residual plot. This combination of factors demonstrates that the proposal would be a contrived and unsatisfactory layout which would intrude into the spacious and more open layout of development to the west of St Marys Road.
8. The existing two-storey, modern houses on the east side of St Marys Road have limited architectural merit and do not make a significant contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. However, the proposed dwelling would primarily relate to the parent property and other buildings on the western side of the street. In this context the design and scale of the proposed chalet bungalow, with low eaves and ridge, would result in it appearing to be dominated by the larger buildings around it, even though it would be partially obscured by the roadside vegetation. In my view it would appear out of scale with nearby residential development, especially the dwellings in Greenwood Place. Consequently, it would fail to integrate satisfactorily with its surroundings. This would be the case irrespective of the presence of chalet bungalows elsewhere in the village.
9. The roadside boundary on the western side of St Marys Road includes a row of low value trees which are protected by virtue of their location within the Conservation Area. These trees, when combined with the associated hedgerow, form a substantial natural feature on this side of the street. Its height is accentuated by its position on a modest-sized embankment, adding to the sense of enclosure along the lane. Whilst the individual trees are not of high quality, this area of landscaping as a whole makes a significant contribution to the appearance of the Conservation Area. The proposed access would require the removal of a section of this hedgerow and several of the trees would be lost. Furthermore, in order to create appropriate visibility splays at the access it is likely that more of the vegetation would be lost or cut back. In my view this would adversely affect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

10. Taking all these factors into consideration, I conclude that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the Wrotham Conservation Area, which would not be preserved, although in terms of the Framework this harm would be less than substantial. The proposal would be contrary to Policies CP1, CP13 and CP24 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Core Strategy and Policy SQ1 of the Tonbridge and Malling Managed Development and the Environment DPD. These policies, amongst other things, require development to be high quality and appropriate in scale and character to its context, especially in areas protected for their historic interest.

Planning Balance and Conclusions

11. I accept that the appeal site lies within the village boundary and there is therefore no objection in principle to a residential development in this locality. There would be a small social benefit associated with the provision of a single dwelling. These limited public benefits weigh in the scheme's favour. The proposal would not result in any adverse effects on neighbouring occupants or give rise to concerns about highway safety. However, the absence of harm in relation to these matters is not a positive factor in favour of the development.
12. On the other hand I have found that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the Wrotham Conservation Area. Overall I conclude that the limited benefits arising from the construction of an additional dwelling would not outweigh the less than substantial harm to the heritage asset.
13. For this reason, and having regard to all other relevant matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR