
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 February 2017

by Graham Chamberlain BA MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 17th March 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/H3510/W/16/3162838

Coopers Cottage, 42 Mill Road, Lakenheath, Suffolk IP27 9DU

- 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 David Wells against the decision of Forest Heath District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/16/1436/FUL, dated 1 July 2016, was refused by notice dated 6 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is the construction of a pair of town houses with associated car parking and access arrangements.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. In his appeal statement the appellant indicated an intention to submit an application for an award of costs. However, I have not been presented with an application in this regard. Were an application to be forthcoming, it would be the subject of a separate decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this appeal is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located within the built up confines of Lakenheath and encompasses an area of hardstanding to the north of a small terrace of two storey houses. The appeal site currently has the appearance of an unresolved gap in the street scene between the terrace to the south (Nos 38, 40 and 42 Mill Road) and the more modern development further into School Close. The houses in the vicinity of the appeal site exhibit a number of simple and discernable features which, when taken together, afford them a broad consistency in the form and scale employed. A particularly notable feature is the prevailing use of simple and unbroken pitched roofs and gables.
 5. The appeal site is viewed from both Mill Road and Cemetery Road within the context of School Close, a small infill estate, the development within which is broadly characterised by the simplicity and high degree of uniformity evident in the design, scale and proportions of the individual houses. The simplicity is
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particularly evident in the unassuming single pitched roofs and the conventional two storey scale, which affords the houses a vertical emphasis and a visual harmony. Given this analysis of the area, the Council's view, that a development of the appeal site should respond to these existing features, is not an unsubstantiated requirement.

6. The appeal scheme is for the erection of a pair of semi-detached three storey houses. The second floor would be in the roof. The proposal follows an appeal scheme for a terrace of three properties¹. In determining this appeal the Inspector found that the scheme then proposed would have a height and appearance that would complement the existing development within the area and would bridge the gap between Nos 38, 40 and 42 and the houses in School Close. Nevertheless, her overall conclusion was that three houses would be too many as the development would be unduly cramped and dominated by car parking. As a result, the appeal was dismissed.
7. In respect of the appeal scheme now before me, unlike the previous submission, the appearance of the properties proposed would not complement that of the surrounding development. Instead, the appeal scheme would exhibit a bulky and contrived mansard roof, which would be a discordant feature that would jar with the simple appearance of the other houses in the cul-de-sac. The mansard roof would also accentuate the depth of the semi and result in a jarring horizontal visual emphasis.
8. As a consequence, the proposal would appear as having been contrived to fit the site rather than a proper response to the local characteristics of the surrounding buildings. In this respect, the awkward proportions of the proposed properties would result in them appearing cramped when viewed against the adjoining terrace and the houses in School Close, even though the ridge heights and density of the development would be similar. The additional storey, evident through the insertion of dormer windows, would compound the incongruous and cramped appearance and scale of the proposed houses, as would the combined effect of the proposed footprint and overall massing relative to the site area and nearby properties.
9. Furthermore, the proposed development would not resolve one of the important limitations identified with the previous appeal scheme, as it would still be car dominated to the detriment of the street scene. This is because the proposed semi would be dominated by two integral garages and gravelled car parking spaces would wrap around the front and side of the properties leaving no meaningful space for landscaping to soften these hard surfaces.
10. Altogether, the proposal would be a cramped and contrived addition to the street scene as the two four bedroom properties now proposed would appear squeezed into the site rather than presenting the appearance and character of a natural and harmonious infilling of the available area. As such, the scheme would fail to take the opportunity that is currently available to improve the character and quality of the area.
11. I therefore conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. This would place it at odds with Policies DM2 and DM22 of the Joint² Development Management Policies Document 2015, which

¹ APP/H3510/W/15/3004865

² Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Local Plan

require high quality design that responds to and addresses features and characteristics of the locality. The proposal would also contradict the aims of Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy 2010, which seeks designs that have had regard to local context. This aim is consistent with Paragraph 58 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') and can thus be afforded significant weight.

Other Matters

12. The appellant considers that the proposal would be sustainable development when having regard to its economic, social and environmental benefits and the policies contained in the Framework.
13. The development would increase housing supply and choice but with 2 homes proposed this is only a limited social benefit. The appeal scheme would facilitate some economic benefits to the construction industry, including jobs, but these would be for a limited time and modest in scale. There would also be some benefits to the local economy from the circulation of funds from future occupants but given the modest size of the development, this would also be a limited benefit. The houses would be sited in a location accessible to local services, but this is to be expected from most development in Lakenheath and is therefore a neutral matter rather than a benefit. The proposed houses would incorporate some measures to improve their overall performance in respect of energy efficiency. However, I have not seen anything to suggest these measures go significantly beyond the usual expectations. The proposal would also recycle land with Lakenheath, but this would be in a way harmful to the character and appearance of the area. As such, these are not determinative matters. Together, the benefits accrue limited weight.
14. The benefits advanced as material considerations carry only limited weight in favour of the proposal and are not sufficient to outweigh the harmful impacts I have identified, which are contrary to the development plan taken as a whole and are thus a matter of considerable weight. As such, the development is not sustainable development for which the Framework carries a presumption in favour. Instead, Paragraph 12 of the Framework states that development which conflicts with an up to date development plan should be refused unless there are material considerations which indicate otherwise. In this instance the material considerations do not indicate permission should be forthcoming in spite of the development plan conflict and accordingly, the appeal should fail.
15. In coming to this view I have noted the objections relating to the proximity of the proposal to the adjacent primary school and the concerns in respect of parking. However, given my findings on the main issue it is not necessary for me to consider these points in detail.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Graham Chamberlain
INSPECTOR