
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 April 2017

by Alex Hutson MATP CMLI MArborA

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

Decision date: 5 May 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/G2245/W/16/3166016

Cleve, Seal Hollow Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3SH

- 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 and Mrs Beckford against the decision of Sevenoaks District Council.
 - The application Ref SE/16/00906/FUL, dated 21 March 2016, was refused by notice dated 24 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is "Erection of detached 2-storey dwelling on land to the West of Cleve; Demolition of existing garage and erection of 2-bay replacement; Associated hard and soft landscaping scheme".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site comprises a detached arts and crafts style dwelling, Cleve, set within grounds broadly rectangular in shape and of a substantial size. Cleve is set back a generous distance from Seal Hollow Road and consequently benefits from large garden areas to both the east and west of this dwelling. Pedestrian access can be gained to Seal Hollow Road from the eastern garden area though the main pedestrian and vehicular access is gained to the western part of the appeal site along a private driveway which leads from Wildernesse Mount and which also serves two other dwellings. Land within the appeal site slopes upwards from east to west.
4. The area is predominantly residential in character and dwellings, whilst of a variety of architectural styles, are typically traditional in appearance and occupy generous sized plots. The area has seen a degree of change in the recent past with the subdivision and redevelopment of large plots, including the plots to the immediate north and south of the appeal site¹, and the development of or planning consent for other new dwellings², which tend also to display a traditional appearance. There are also examples of backland development in the area.

¹ Consented under Council Ref SE/15/02759/FUL (relating to Jade Cottage); and Ref SE/12/01980/FUL (relating to Downing House)

² Including Council Ref SE/14/01632/FUL (relating to Summer Hill); and Appeal Ref APP/G2245/A/11/2166676 (relating to 5 Wildernesse Mount)

5. Dwellings along Wildernesse Mount, whilst not displaying any consistent building line, tend to be set back from the road frontage. This is also true of the two recently constructed dwellings to the immediate north of the appeal site which form a sensitive continuation of built form along the eastern side of this road, albeit along the private driveway which leads to the appeal site. This setback of dwellings and the currently undeveloped western part of the appeal site creates an open and attractive vista and a break in built form in views looking south along Wildernesse Mount towards trees and vegetation beyond. This adds a spatial and verdant quality to the streetscene along Wildernesse Mount and contributes positively to the character and appearance of the streetscape and area.
6. The proposal would subdivide the appeal site and would introduce a contemporary 2 storey dwelling with a flat roof onto its western part. The external walls of the proposed dwelling would be largely rendered though some natural timber banding would be incorporated between ground and first floor level and at roof level. Access would be gained along the private driveway from Wildernesse Mount.
7. The Council considers the subdivision of the plot to be acceptable in principle and also accepts that a contemporary building within the western part of the appeal site would be acceptable subject to its sensitive design and siting. I have no substantive reasons to take a different view on these matters. I recognise that the proposed dwelling would occupy a similar footprint and plot ratio to other dwellings in the area and that the appellant has sought to limit its height by incorporating a flat roof. Moreover, I accept that architectural styles should not be imposed or innovation stifled and that render and timber would reflect the materials of some other dwellings in the area.
8. However, the proposed dwelling would be sited considerably further forward than the two recently constructed dwellings to the immediate north of the appeal site. In addition, the submitted plan which shows the proposed Site Section CC indicates that its height would extend considerably above the eaves height of these dwellings. It therefore seems to me that the height of the approximate roofline shown on photograph 'Viewpoint b' (located at the junction of Wildernesse Mount and the private driveway leading to the appeal site) of the submitted Visual Impact Assessment (VIA), has been underestimated. Moreover, I observed that the recently constructed garage building to the north of the appeal site as built appears to be substantially lower than it is portrayed within the Proposed Site Section CC.
9. As such, the proposal would introduce a large and prominent building into the vista along Wildernesse Mount which would considerably enclose the visual gap and would inhibit views to vegetation beyond. This would erode the spatial and verdant qualities of the streetscape. In addition, the bulky and geometric shape of the proposed dwelling and the limited fenestration on its northern elevation would appear in stark contrast to the appearance of other dwellings in the area and would exert a utilitarian and institutional building form into views from along Wildernesse Mount. The modest setback of the first floor at the western end of the proposed dwelling and the horizontal timber banding would not, in my judgement, adequately reduce or break up its overall bulk and massing. Nor would it adequately achieve a subservient first floor level.

10. I observed that some addition landscaping, including trees, had recently been planted along the eastern boundary of the appeal site which reflect the location and species of planting shown on the submitted landscape plan. However, these are not of a sufficient size or density to provide any significant screening of the proposed dwelling in views from along Wildernesse Mount. In addition, it is likely to take many years before they reach a height and level of maturity to achieve any meaningful screening benefit.
11. I therefore conclude that by virtue of its siting, design, bulk and massing, the proposed dwelling would appear as an incongruous and alien form of development out of keeping with the prevailing form and pattern of development in the area. It would erode the spatial and verdant qualities of the streetscape and would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area.
12. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policies SP1- Design of New Development and Conservation and SP7- Density of Housing Development, of the Sevenoaks District Council Core Strategy 2011; and Policy EN1- Design Principles, of the Sevenoaks District Council Allocations and Development Management Plan 2015. These policies require, amongst other things, development to be of a high quality design and to respond to, respect and not compromise the distinctive character of the site and surrounding area. These policies are consistent with the broad aims and objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework which require planning to secure high quality design, to take account of the different roles and character of different areas and to reinforce local distinctiveness.
13. It would also conflict with the guidance of the Sevenoaks Residential Character Area 2012 Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD advises that, in respect of Character Area HO3: Seal Hollow Road/Blackhall Lane, within which the site is located, the scale, height and mass of new development should fit unobtrusively within its setting and should not appear cramped on the site or out of context with the character of the street.

Other matters

14. I acknowledge that the proposed dwelling would incorporate high levels of energy efficiency and would be built using sustainable construction techniques. It would also provide a high quality home with a good living environment for any future occupiers. These benefits weigh moderately in favour of the proposal. However, they would not be sufficient, in my view, to outweigh the harm that would arise to the character and appearance of the area.
15. The appellant has raised some concerns over the Council's procedures in dealing with the original planning application. Nevertheless, this is not a matter for my consideration in an appeal under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons set out above and having regard to all other matters, including privacy, outlook, light, noise and disturbance during any construction and the setting of non-designated heritage assets, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Alex Hutson INSPECTOR