

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 June 2017

by H Lock BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 28 June 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/J3530/D/17/3171623
56 Seckford Street, WOODBRIDGE, IP12 4LY

- 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 & Mrs A Pollard against the decision of Suffolk Coastal District Council.
 - The application Ref. DC/16/4890/FUL, dated 18 October 2016, was refused by notice dated 12 January 2017.
 - The development proposed is the removal of existing brick wall and railings to frontage and formation of parking bay and associated landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on (1) highway safety; and (2) the character and appearance of the street scene and this part of the Woodbridge Conservation Area.

Reasons

Highway Safety

3. The appeal property is in an elevated position on the northern side of Seckford Street, and the historic pattern on this side of the road is of buildings built up to the roadway. There is a narrow verge in between the buildings and road, but this offers limited separation and generally contains steps into buildings, and planters. The appeal property has an enclosed front garden with steps down to the verge and road.
 4. There is evident parking pressure in the vicinity and I appreciate the need for the proposed space. At the time of the appeal site visit parked cars lined the southern side of the road, and combined with double yellow lines along the northern side, the usable carriageway width is effectively single lane at this point. The appellants' letter supplied by G H Bullard & Associates LLP, dated 31 October 2016, advises that a driver using the proposed layby will almost certainly approach from the west, but vehicles currently travel in both directions and there would be nothing to prevent access from the east.
 5. The area of the proposed parking space is flanked by the appeal building and neighbouring property, both of which are built up to the verge. The appellants advise that the width of the gap exceeds that of a typical on-street space and
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the space standards for a layby parking space. However, I consider that the enclosure and restricted visibility created by the dwellings either side, and the limited manoeuvring area, would act as an impediment to the usability of the space. Although the appellants question the validity of the visibility splays specified by Suffolk County Council as highway authority, the forward visibility from the proposed space would nevertheless be restricted.

6. Moreover, once a vehicle is in the space its presence would be largely concealed from approaching drivers by the buildings, thereby posing an unnecessary and unexpected hazard when vehicles exit the appeal site. I do not share the view of the appellants' traffic consultant that the roadside verge would ensure that a car parked in the space would render it visible to approaching drivers.
7. The appellants advise that the roadside verge would allow for the safe opening of vehicle doors. However, I consider that car doors opening over the verge would create a hazardous distraction. Moreover, as there is little physical delineation between the verge and roadway at this point of the road, drivers and passengers exiting onto the verge would potentially be at risk from approaching vehicles on the road.
8. I acknowledge that there is no footway in front of the site and that pedestrians are more likely to use the path on the opposite side of the road. However, as many properties on the northern side access onto the verge and road, I find that the limited visibility for vehicles exiting the proposed parking space would create an unacceptable risk to those pedestrians.
9. I appreciate that vehicles may already reverse into smaller on-street parallel parking spaces, but such spaces are not concealed and visibility surrounding their use is greater than proposed in this case.
10. The appellants have drawn attention to other properties where vehicles reverse onto the highway. No details have been supplied of the planning status of such arrangements, but in any event an existing hazardous access would not justify acceptance of a development that would create its own risks. I note the appellants' reference to traffic being limited outside of school-drop off times, and that the estimate of their traffic consultant is that the 85 percentile speed is well under 30mph. However, this is not supported by any submitted data.
11. I note that there is a shortfall of spaces to serve the number of properties in Seckford Street but any functional benefit in the provision of a space at the appeal site would be offset by the potential hazards that it would create.
12. I therefore conclude that the proposal would be detrimental to highway safety, in conflict with the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) with regard to achieving safe and suitable access to sites and to create safe and secure layouts which minimise conflicts between traffic and cyclists or pedestrians.

Character and Appearance

13. Seckford Street is located within the Woodbridge Conservation Area and the associated appraisal¹ (CAA) notes that the character area of Seckford Street is

¹ Woodbridge Conservation Area Appraisal Supplementary Planning Document July 2011

dominated by the Seckford Almshouses, Hospital and terrace walls and railings. The appeal site is one of a few properties in the vicinity with a defined front garden, and these are generally enclosed by walls and railings. Although the wall to be demolished may be modern, its materials and traditional bond complement the historic character and appearance of the site and the area; it may not be identified as an important wall in the CAA but nevertheless makes a positive contribution. Given the prevalence of terraced housing there are few gaps along this stretch of Seckford Street and the creation of an open parking area would be an incongruous and disruptive intrusion, at odds with the historic street scene. The proposed materials and landscaping would not mitigate the adverse visual impact.

14. There is a duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area in exercising planning functions, and paragraph 134 of the Framework advises that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In this case, there would not evidently be any public benefits arising from the proposal that would justify the harm to the heritage asset (the conservation area). The opening up of the space to expose to view the gable end and the plinth return of the appeal building would not be a material public benefit.
15. I therefore conclude that the proposal would detract from the character and appearance of the street scene and would fail to preserve or enhance this part of the Woodbridge Conservation Area, in conflict with the aims of Core Strategy² Policy SP15, to enhance and preserve the historic attributes of the town, and with Policy DM22, in respect of the impact of the proposal on the design quality and appearance of the area; and with the conservation aims of Saved Policy AP1, as the proposal would not be in harmony with, and relate satisfactorily to, its surroundings. I find no conflict with Policy DM23, which relates to the impact on residential amenity, but this does not alter my decision.

Conclusion

16. Overall I conclude that the proposed development would result in material harm to highway safety and to the character and appearance of the area, including the Woodbridge Conservation Area. These environmental harms would outweigh any limited economic or social benefits that would arise from the proposal, and it would not constitute sustainable development supported through the Framework. As a consequence, I conclude that this appeal should be dismissed.

H Lock

INSPECTOR

² Suffolk Coastal District Local Plan Core Strategy & Development Management Policies 2013