
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 July 2017

by Zoe Raygen Dip URP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 11th August 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/W/16/3158652
2A Old Station Road, Bury, Ramsey, Cambs

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr M Peters against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/00705/OUT, dated 25 March 2016, was refused by notice dated 27 May 2016.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of existing burnt out empty building, outline planning application with some reserved matters for four new dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. The application was submitted in outline form, with access, layout and scale to be considered and landscaping and appearance reserved for future consideration. I have determined the appeal on that basis.
3. The appellant has produced a revised layout plan (4444 101A) as part of his appeal submission in order to address the Council's reason for refusal. The amended layout allows the introduction of tree planting and a hedge to the side and front of the site. Furthermore, the length of the proposed houses is slightly reduced. The Council has commented on the amendments within its submission and, given the minor nature of the alterations, I do not consider that any party would be prejudiced were I to consider the revisions as part of the proposal. I have therefore determined the appeal on that basis.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposal preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Ramsey Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. The Ramsey Conservation Area covers a large part of the settlement and has a varied character ranging from medieval streets and buildings to Victorian and Edwardian suburbs. Its significance is derived from its historic and architectural interest as an older market town which has evolved over time incorporating different styles of architecture.

6. The Ramsey Conservation Area Character Assessment 2005 (RCACA) divides the Conservation Area into localities, one of which is 19th century industrial areas. Within that locality is the Ramsey East Station site within which the appeal site is located. The RCACA identifies that this area, following the demolition of the railway complex requires redevelopment rather than enhancement. It states though that this should be done sensitively to preserve the physical grain given to the site by its history.
7. Consequently, much of the area around the appeal site has been redeveloped resulting in a mixture of modern residential and business use together with open space. The residential development is mainly in the form of terraced housing set back slightly from the road with parking to the side or rear creating a linear, uniform form of development following the route of the former railway line, along Old Station Road. Planting and trees give a pleasant verdant appearance to the area with many of the front boundaries defined by hedges.
8. The appeal site contains a derelict building and a number of trees both mature and self-set. While therefore the trees contribute positively to the verdant character of the area, the building in its poor state of repair detracts from the overall appearance.
9. The proposed terrace of four houses would in their unit width, depth and height be similar to those at Porters Terrace to the south east of the appeal site and, in these respects, would be representative of the character of the existing residential development. Nevertheless, the proposed houses would be set a significant distance back from the highway to incorporate car parking to the front of the site, creating an incongruous form of development. As a result the strong linear form of development along the road would be considerably eroded and consequently the appeal proposal would not preserve the historic physical grain represented by the former railway line. There would be material harm in this regard and, as a consequence, the character and appearance of the conservation area would not be preserved.
10. I note the suggestion by the appellant that the proposed planting to the front parking area, together with the set-back for the houses when viewed with the open space on the opposite side of the road would create an informal square forming a focal point along the street. I accept that the introduction of landscaping would, to an extent, off-set the loss of the trees on the site ensuring that the verdant character of the area would be preserved. However, the revisions would not outweigh the harm caused to the historical significance of the area by the siting of the proposed houses a substantial distance back from the established building line.
11. The appellant points to the unpopularity of parking to the rear of houses. However, I have been provided with no substantive evidence to suggest that this should lead to a substantial change to the design ethos of the street.
12. I acknowledge that the layout of the adjacent commercial garage allows the parking of cars adjacent to the highway. Nonetheless this is not, in itself, given the small number of cars involved, sufficient to alter the strong linear character of built residential development and therefore justify the appeal proposal.
13. Accordingly, although the removal of the existing building would enhance the character and appearance of the CA, its replacement with the appeal proposal would result in material harm. Whilst the harm to the character and

- appearance of the CA would, in this instance, be less than substantial, it is a consideration of significant weight and, under the terms of the Framework requires justification by way of public benefits the development may bring.
14. The construction of the building would derive some economic benefits but this would be for a limited time. The development would contribute four units of accommodation within an accessible location towards the Council's housing supply.
 15. I note that there is some dispute between the parties over whether to apply a 5% or 20% buffer to the Council's housing supply figures. Even if I were to accept the appellant's stance which results in the Council not having a five year housing land supply, the delivery of four houses would only make a limited contribution to the housing land supply. Moreover, similar benefits could be achieved from a scheme whose design did not cause the same harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
 16. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) notes that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and that great weight should be given to their conservation. The benefit of the additional housing would not therefore in this instance outweigh the resulting harm to the Conservation Area.
 17. For the reasons above I consider that the proposal would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Ramsey Conservation Area. It would therefore be contrary to Policies En5, En6, En9 and En25 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan Part One 1995, Policy HL5 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alteration 2002, Policy CS1 of the Huntingdonshire Core Strategy 2009, Policies LP1, LP13, LP17 and LP31 of the Draft Local Plan to 2036: Stage 3 2013, and the Framework. These require, amongst other things, that development should be of the highest standard of design, does not impair the existing street scene, reflects the local pattern of streets and spaces within the townscape and preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Conservation Areas.
 18. Although the Council's adopted development plan is relatively old I find that the above policies have broad accordance with parts 7 and 12 of the Framework regarding good design and conserving and enhancing the historic environment. I therefore have given them full weight in my decision.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Zoe Raygen

INSPECTOR