



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 July 2017

by N A Holdsworth MCD MRTPI

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

Decision date: 08/09/17

Appeal Ref: APP/U2235/W/17/3173428

St Faiths Bungalow, St Faiths Lane, Bearsted, Maidstone, ME14 4JN

- 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 B Wharton against the decision of Maidstone Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 16/506630/FULL, dated 30 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 11 January 2017.
 - The development proposed is Demolish existing bungalow and replace with 2 no detached 4 bedroom dwellings, set on 3 floors with associated parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The existing building on the appeal site forms part of a collection of detached dwellings located on St Faiths Lane. Whilst there is significant variation in the appearance of individual buildings along this road, there is a consistent pattern of large plot sizes and substantial gaps between buildings, which contribute to a distinctive spacious and suburban character. The development at Bearsted Views to the immediate north of the site is more intensive; however this area is separated from the remainder of St Faiths Lane by a substantial boundary wall and gate, which forms an established visual break in the surrounding townscape.
4. The appeal site is smaller than others along St Faiths Lane and has a truncated rear garden when compared with the building directly to the south. As a consequence of its plot dimensions and building line, the existing building appears considerably more prominent in the street-scene than others that surround it. However, due to its limited height and the existence of a large gap between the building and its respective boundaries, it still reflects the prevailing characteristics of the townscape to the south and west along St Faiths Lane.
5. The proposed development would create two detached dwellings, faced in brick with hipped roofs and two distinct plots. Whilst the general style of development is replicated within the Bearsted Views development and to the rear at St Faiths Court, it would contrast sharply with the larger buildings to

the south and west along St Faiths Lane, and which form its principal setting. Whilst there would be a small gap between the two buildings and their respective boundaries, these gaps would be considerably smaller than that which is found in the prevailing townscape pattern. As such, I concur with the Council's view that the buildings would appear cramped in their setting.

6. The two replacement buildings would also be considerably higher than the existing building and would be sited forward of its building line. As such, they would be prominent features in the street-scene and would be readily visible in views along St Faiths Lane. The prominence of the buildings would exacerbate the harm that arises as a consequence of the poor relationship between the proposed development and the area that surrounds it.
7. Whilst some sub division of the other plots and redevelopment along St Faiths Lane has occurred, these developments have not, even cumulatively, resulted in harm to the prevailing townscape pattern. The existence of developments of similar density at Bearsted Views and St Faith's Court does not justify similar development on the appeal site given that, for the reasons given above, it has a different relationship with the surrounding area. Examples of other developments in the wider area of Bearsted have very little relevance to this decision.
8. I accept that the appeal proposal would provide good quality housing that meets a local demand, within a sustainable location. However, for the reasons set out above it would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area. This harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of one additional dwelling. The proposed development conflicts with chapter 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework which, amongst other things, seeks to ensure new developments improve the character and quality of an area and the way it functions. It also conflicts with policies DM1 and DM8 of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan Publication (Regulation 19) February 2016 which shares similar aims.

Other issues

9. The plans depict an earlier approved scheme for one dwelling on the site, which I understand could be built as an alternative to the appeal scheme. On the basis of the evidence before me it is clear that the harm to the character and appearance of the area arises from elements that are distinct to the appeal proposal. Whilst I note that another similar planning application relating to the appeal site was previously refused by the Council for different reasons, this fact in itself does not justify the development. Concerns about the conduct of planning officers and members of planning committee have no bearing on the material planning issues under consideration in this appeal, and it is not within my remit to investigate such allegations.

Conclusion

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

INSPECTOR

Neil Holdsworth