



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 August 2019

by Rachael Pipkin, BA (Hons), MPhil, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6th September 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/W/19/3230506

55 Townsend Drive, St Albans, AL3 5RN

- 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 Craig Linney against the decision of St Albans City & District Council.
 - The application Ref: 5/2018/2889 dated 21 February 2018, was refused by notice dated 18 February 2019.
 - The development proposed is new build dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on:
 - The character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - The living conditions of future occupants of 55 Townsend Drive, with particular regard to the provision of outdoor space.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal site comprises a two-storey semi-detached house, a driveway separates it from the neighbouring property at 57 Townsend Drive (No. 57). It is located on the west side of Townsend Drive, which within the immediate vicinity of the appeal site, is characterised by pairs of semi-detached houses set within spacious plots.
4. The proposed development is to demolish an existing single-storey garage, sub-divide the plot and construct a two-storey detached house adjacent to 55 Townsend Drive (No. 55). The proposed house would have a shared drive with No. 55 using the existing access which would be extended.
5. The gaps between pairs of semi-detached properties are characteristic of this section of Townsend Drive and contribute to a sense of spaciousness around properties. The proposed house would fill that space between Nos. 55 and 57 leaving little space around these houses, resulting in a cramped form of development. Consequently, the proposed house would appear shoehorned

into the space and would erode the spacious and open character of the surrounding area.

6. The proposed house would be significantly narrower than No. 55. It would also be detached. This form of development would be out of keeping with adjacent residential properties which are wider and semi-detached. It would therefore fail to relate to other properties on the street frontage and would appear as an incongruous feature within the streetscene.
7. Whilst the existing front drive is hard surfaced and could accommodate four cars, the proposed development would make the driveway much more open and prominent through the enlargement of the access to provide two parking bays directly in front of the proposed house. The driveway would become a much more dominant feature of the property, which would detract from the appearance of the streetscene.
8. Drawing together the strands of my assessment, I consider the proposed house would be out of keeping with the character and appearance of the surrounding area in terms of its form, style and its position being squeezed in between Nos. 55 and 57, which would reduce the spacious character of the area.
9. Consequently, I conclude that the proposed development would significantly harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It would therefore conflict with Saved Policies 69 and 70 of the City and District of St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994 (the Local Plan) which together and amongst other things, seek development that has a high standard of design that has regard to the character of its surroundings. It would also not comply with the design objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

Living conditions

10. The rear garden of No. 55 is triangular in shape. As part of the proposal, it would be subdivided to provide private garden space for both the existing and the proposed houses. The plans indicate that the garden to No. 55 would be 47sqm. I note that the appellant's statement indicates this area is 58 sqm but this appears to include a shared side access passage which would not be useable garden space.
11. The Council's Design Advice Leaflet No. 1: Design and Layout of New Housing (1998) advises that for a three-bedroom house, private garden space of 80sqm should be provided and for a two-bedroom house, 60sqm. No. 55 appears to be a three-bedroom house and the garden space falls significantly below this size threshold. I note it would also fall below the threshold for a two-bedroom house. The space is west facing and relatively open on its southern boundary which would ensure it receives plenty of sunlight. However, it would be triangular and a cramped and awkward shape making it impractical to use all of the space. This would further reduce the amount of useable private garden space for this house.
12. I conclude that the proposed development would harm the living conditions of future occupants of 55 Townsend Drive, with particular regard to the provision of outdoor space. It would therefore conflict with Saved Policies 69 and 70 of the Local Plan which together, and amongst other things, seek high quality development that provides adequate garden space for the number of persons

for which it serves. It would also not comply with the design objectives of the Framework.

Other Matters

13. The scheme has some local support. The proposed house would be within walking distance of services and facilities and would therefore be in an accessible location. The size of the proposed dwelling would provide satisfactory living conditions for future occupiers. These are all positive aspects that weigh in favour of the scheme.
14. The appellant has drawn my attention to a number of other recent developments within the surrounding area where he asserts the Council has been inconsistent in its approach. I do not have the full details of these schemes before me, however, I observe that they are for conversion schemes and house extensions and therefore not directly comparable to the scheme before me. In any event, I must assess the proposal before me on its own individual planning merits.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

15. The Council accepts that it is not able to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites. This represents a housing shortfall. In such circumstances, paragraph 11 of the Framework indicates that housing policies should be regarded as out of date and that there is a 'tilted balance' in favour of granting permission. I acknowledge that provision of a detached dwelling contributes to the supply of housing. However, that contribution in this case is very modest and my finding is that the harm to character and appearance and living conditions would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the tilted balance in favour of granting permission.
16. For these reasons, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Rachael Pipkin

Inspector