



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 August 2019

by Patrick Hanna MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16th September 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/19/3231454

Westroad Garage, Rothbury Road, Longframlington NE65 8HX

- 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 Tustain Motors Ltd against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 18/02671/FUL, dated 26 July 2018, was refused by notice dated 25 February 2019.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing buildings and erection of 9 residential units with associated access (amended site location plan and red line boundary, and reduction in number of units in scheme 04.11.2018).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The description of development on the appeal form and the Council's decision letter reflect amendments made to the proposal after submission of the original application. Accordingly, I have used this amended description in my decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on (a) the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to height, massing, and design; and (b) the setting of a listed building.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site is a vehicle workshop and car showroom, comprising a mixed collection of buildings; most are single storey, although some contain two-storey elements. The frontage buildings are constructed in stone or composite stone with tiled roofs; those to the rear are more utilitarian and include use of modern steel-cladding. A forecourt occupies the frontage of the site, looking out over a large area of public open space and allotments. The surrounding area is predominantly residential, of varying styles and with differing materials, with the Grade II listed Rookwood House and adjacent cottage to the west.
5. The proposal would result in the erection of 9 dwellings. The northern terrace of three, Plots 1 to 3, would be two-and-a-half-storeys in height, albeit that Plot 1 is shown with no attic accommodation installed. The height of this block,

allied to its close proximity to the site boundary, would present a stark contrast with the single storey dwellings to the north. At my site visit, I observed that the dwellings at Cairn Park have low eaves and ridge heights and shallow pitched roofs, such that the visual characteristic of this street is modest with horizontal emphasis. From Cairn Park, and the dwellings there, the outlook would be visually dominated by the excessive height of the proposed gable end, tight to the boundary. In the absence of visual evidence to demonstrate otherwise, I agree with the objections raised in regard to this element of the proposal. The contrast between the existing and proposed would, from my observations, simply be too great to be considered appropriate to the context.

6. The appellant has referred to the committee report that highlights the presence of other two-and-a-half storey dwellings elsewhere, indeed, I observed this from the appeal site. However, it is the excessive height of the northern block in this particular context that causes harm. Elsewhere, I find that the height and massing of the proposed dwellings broadly reflects the adjacent dwellings, in general terms. When travelling along Rothbury Road, the massing of the southern block of three dwellings, Plots 7 to 9, would follow the existing building line, and would fit comfortably into the varied rhythm of ridge heights. Similarly, the central terrace, Plots 4 to 6, would relate acceptably, in terms of massing and height, to the two-storey dwellings along Church Street.
7. In terms of design, the site is surrounded by a mixture of styles and materials. However, its prominent position on a main thoroughfare, next to a listed building and opposite a public park, demands a sensitive design. I find that the proposal largely delivers that, in general terms. Although the density of the development would be somewhat higher than that found to the north and west of the site, it would be comparable to the east. The dwellings would be neatly articulated and of traditional form. Materials are a matter of significant dispute between the parties, specifically the use of brick. However, my observations indicate that the use of brick in the proposed northern and central terraces is in keeping with the dwellings to the east and north of the site, from where access would be taken. Accordingly, and with regard to my below reasoning on the setting of the listed building, I find the proposed materials would not have an adverse effect on the general character and appearance of the area.
8. Overall, I conclude that the proposed development would have a significant adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area to the north of the appeal site, with particular regard to the height of the northern terrace. As such, the proposal is contrary to Policy S16 of the Alnwick District Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Setting of listed building

9. Rookwood House and the adjacent cottage (hereafter referred to as Rookwood) is a Grade II listed building, dating from 1717, immediately adjacent to the appeal site. The significance of Rookwood is noted in the Heritage Statement as deriving from its age, attractive appearance, unusual orientation, and its legibility as one of the oldest buildings in Longframlington. Constructed in stone and slate, this fine building makes an important and positive contribution to the locality. In having special regard to the desirability of preserving the building's setting, I note that the main points of dispute are, specifically, the erection of town houses and the materials used.

10. Rookwood's contribution to the locality, whilst important, is currently somewhat diminished by its setting adjacent to the rather unstructured and haphazard appearance of the appeal site. In contrast, the proposed development would help to improve that setting in overall terms. The proposed southern block of three dwellings, Plots 7 to 9, would follow the established building of Rothbury Road; be of broadly similar heights to Rookwood; and would adopt similar architectural features, in terms of form, balanced elevational treatments, central pedimented doors, gable chimneys, vertically emphasised windows, and use of natural slate. Whether the proposed dwellings would be defined as town houses or not, their siting and general design would, in my view and from my observations on site, preserve the overall setting of Rookwood.
11. In terms of materials, the dwellings are proposed to be brick, with stone detailing. Whilst brick is found in nearby existing dwellings, Rookwood is stone. I note from submissions that the appellant had subsequently agreed to the suggested use of stone on the elevations of the dwellings facing Rothbury Road, to be conditioned accordingly. On that basis, the proposed dwellings adjacent to the listed building would be of sympathetic materials. As such, I find no harm is caused to the setting of the listed building. Accordingly, the proposal complies with Policy S15 of the Alnwick District Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Other matters

12. The principle of residential development at the site is not disputed, and I agree that development of this previously developed site would bring benefits, in terms of complimentary land use, contribution to housing supply, and visual improvement to the Rothbury Road street scene. However, these benefits do not outweigh the harm I have found above. A number of other matters have been raised, including objections on grounds of loss of the garage and associated employment, alternative uses, highway safety, access and parking, need for the development, impact on infrastructure, drainage of the site, effect on local services, living conditions and impact on the village green. However, none of these matters are determinative to this appeal and, consequently, do not outweigh my above findings. Matters relating to ownership of the site and hedge, devaluation of property, and the handling of the application are outside my jurisdiction. Instead, I must determine the appeal proposal on its merits.

Conclusion

13. I have found that the development would not have a detrimental effect on the setting of the Rookwood House and adjacent cottage listed building. However, this is outweighed by the harm caused to the character and appearance of Cairn Park from the excessive height of the northern terrace of the proposed development. Whilst this single issue represents a relatively small part of the overall scheme, nevertheless it makes the proposal unacceptable. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Patrick Hanna

INSPECTOR