



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 June 2019

by Hilary Orr MSc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 September 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/D3640/W/19/3223470

9 Southwell Park Road, Camberley GU15 3PU

- 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 Hoskins Development Ltd against the decision of Surrey Heath Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 18/0600, dated 4 July 2018, was refused by notice dated 12 September 2018.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing residential dwelling and erection of 6 two-bedroom flats with associated car parking and amenity, bin and cycle stores.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the development upon;
 - the character and appearance of the area; and
 - the living conditions of residents at 7 Southwell Park Road with particular reference to outlook;

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The site is located on the southern side of Southwell Park Road, close to the junctions with Grande Avenue and Firwood Road. The area is residential in character with two-storey dwellings of varying designs and size set in generally spacious plots. To the east the scale of buildings changes significantly, becoming greater in scale and height towards Camberley Town Centre.
4. The proposal would result in the demolition of the existing dwelling and its replacement with a two and a half storey building, providing six, two bedroom flats. The proposed building is well designed with particular attention to the roof form and architectural detailing. The red brick and window design together with the dormers, roof lights and gables that have been used to interrupt the roofscape, all provide references to the existing dwelling and interest to the building. The building would be higher than other buildings in the vicinity. However, given the variation that already exists, I do not consider that this would be harmful.

5. The appeal site is located within the Edwardian Mosaic Character Area as defined by the wider Western Urban Area Character Area Supplementary Planning Document (WUA SPD). This sets out the significance of the Edwardian Mosaic Character Area, which is mainly derived from the many ornate buildings of the period. In particular "the prevalence of grand Victorian /Edwardian buildings, many of which retain building scales and decorative features common to that period".
6. The WUA SPD gives additional guidance on how new development should respond to its context and create or reinforce local distinctiveness. Buildings should predominantly contain traditional elements of the late Victorian/Edwardian and interwar periods. This includes building forms in terms of scale, massing and height. The Residential Design Guide supplementary planning document (2017), further emphasises the need for development to respect the spacing, heights and footprints of existing buildings, especially when relating to historic patterns. Large buildings with large areas of flat roof will be resisted unless proposals make a positive contribution to the streetscape.
7. The glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework, in summary, defines a heritage asset as a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance, meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing). Whilst not currently listed, the Council consider that it is of local interest as a non-designated heritage asset. They go on to advise that its status will be reviewed as part of the review of its List of Local Heritage Assets.
8. Although the design and age of the subject dwelling does not follow the pattern of Edwardian Mosaic Character buildings, being of a later period and of distinctive Arts and Crafts design. It was built during the 1930's with a catslide roof to the east and attractive large chimneys. I accept that the newer side extension and poor standard of maintenance does mar the appearance of the original building to some degree. Nonetheless, its attractive original design is clearly discernible and continues to make a positive contribution to the area, such that it should be retained, unless the benefits of its replacement would clearly outweigh its loss. I therefore consider that given the dwellings degree of significance it is reasonable to view it as a non-designated heritage asset.
9. When assessing the acceptability of development affecting non-designated assets, a balanced judgement is needed to assess the significance of that heritage asset and the scale of any harm to, or loss of that asset. Development resulting in a total loss of an asset of significance will not normally be permitted. Overall the existing dwelling, despite the unsympathetic extension and its poor standard of maintenance, is an attractive building which adds interest and makes a positive contribution to the street scene and to this area of special character.
10. My attention has been drawn to a recent appeal decision (APP/D3640/W/18/3207009). This appeal for a slightly larger, but similar scheme, was dismissed in May 2019. There are a number of similarities to the previous scheme, but several aspects of this later proposal have been amended in an attempt to overcome the Councils ongoing concerns.

11. The proposed building has now been set further back from Southwell Park Road by just over a metre. This would, to some extent, reduce its prominence when viewed from the road. Nonetheless, it would still project beyond the front elevation of No 7 by some 3.5 metres, making it still highly visible in the street scene.
12. Principle 7.4 of the Residential Design Guide (RDG SPD) advises that new residential development should reflect the spacing, heights and building footprints of existing buildings. The total floor space has been reduced by some 32 square metres from the previous scheme. This has inevitably slightly reduced the scale and mass of the proposed building. However, in my judgement, a reduction of this limited size, on a building of this scale, is not sufficient to overcome the harm caused by the very substantial depth, height and mass of the building, when viewed in the context of the area and compared with neighbouring buildings.
13. I agree with the previous Inspector that the crown elements of the roof, whilst not common features in the area, are not excessive and therefore would not detract from the overall appearance of the building. I also acknowledge the previous Inspectors views that the reduction in width of the proposed building, would be an improvement from the existing position. However, the substantial depth height and mass of the building would still be at odds with other development in the area. The relatively open frontage, together with the set-back siting of No 7, would give clear views of both the front and side elevations when travelling from the town centre, making it appear overlarge and incongruous within the plot.
14. Overall, I find that the proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area, due to its excessive depth and mass. Therefore, the proposed development does not justify the loss of this non-designated heritage asset. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies DM9 and DM17 of The Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies (2012). In summary, these policies seek to ensure that new development respects and enhances the local, natural or historic character of the environment, paying particular regard to scale, materials, massing, bulk and density, whilst seeking to promote the conservation and enhancement of any heritage asset and its setting.

Living Conditions

15. The eastern flank elevation has been amended from the previous scheme, giving a second step back from the boundary with No 7, increasing the gap between the building and the main part of the garden. The eaves and ridge heights have been reduced and further changes have been made to the roof design. The nearest wall of the proposed building would now extend some 4 metres beyond the rear elevation of No 7. The gap would further increase to some 7.6 metres towards the new inset section. These combined changes reduce the overbearing impact of the building on the neighbouring property to an acceptable degree.
16. I recognise that the eastern elevation of the proposed building would undoubtedly be visible from the garden of No 7. Nonetheless, given the limited part of the garden that would now be affected, it is not considered that this would be detrimental to the enjoyment of the space by the occupiers.

17. Overall, I find that the proposed development would not cause unacceptable harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of No 7 Southwell Park Road. Accordingly, I find no conflict with Policy DM9 of The Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies (2012).
18. I have had regard to all of the matters raised by the various interested parties, including loss of privacy and overshadowing. The proposed development is considered to be sited at a sufficient distance away from neighbouring properties, to avoid any harm to their living conditions in this regard.

Other matters

19. The Habitat Regulations 2015 require an assessment to be undertaken as to whether a proposal would be likely to have a significant effect, on the interest features of a protected site. The Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (TBH SPA) is such a protected site.
20. The TBH SPA was designated in 2005 and is one of the South East's most important natural assets with the lowland heath supporting important populations of Dartford Warbler, Nightjar and Woodlark which are vulnerable ground-nesting birds. The appeal site lies within five kilometres from the TBH SPA and would provide a net increase in occupancy. Therefore, the development has the potential to cause harm to the TBH SPA. However, as I have already identified, substantive harm to the character and appearance of the area, such that the appeal should be dismissed, there is no need to consider this further.
21. I have considered the Appellants view that that existing vegetative screening would, to some degree, screen views of the proposed building from Foxdown Close to the west. However, there is no guarantee that this would provide a permanent solution. Even if new planting within the site was required by planning condition, this would only provide screening for five years, after which it could be removed. In any event screening would not provide adequate justification for allowing otherwise unacceptable development.
22. My attention has also been drawn to other examples where there are instances of similar development. I have no evidence before me to confirm the planning history or circumstances for these sites and whether they are directly comparable. In any event, I have to determine this appeal on its own planning merits, and their presence would not justify granting this appeal.
23. It is common ground that the Council cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing, and there is a need for two and three bedroom dwellings in the Borough. I have also had regard to the local financial contribution the development would make, in respect of employment and New Homes Bonus. These are all factors that weigh in favour of the proposed development. However, I have also identified that significant harm would be caused to the character and appearance of the area. This harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefit of providing these additional five dwellings, such that the appeal should be dismissed.

Conclusion

24. Whilst I have found that the proposed development would not harm the living conditions of the occupiers of No 7 Southwell Park Road, I do find that the

proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Hilary Orr

INSPECTOR