



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 November 2019

by S Dean MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18th November 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/B5480/W/19/3236960

15A Station Road, Gidea Park, Romford, Essex RM2 6BX

- 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 M Saleem against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Havering.
 - The application Ref P0984.19, dated 10 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 16 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is an office development.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The second reason for refusal states that the drawings submitted with the application did not contain sufficient detail for the Council to fully assess the impact of the proposal, despite the first reason for refusal. I do not consider this to be the case and agree with the appellant that the Council could have sought more detail or information if it had required it. I have determined the appeal on the basis of the submitted drawings.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including on the setting of the Gidea Park Conservation Area (the CA).

Reasons

4. The appeal site is a tapering parcel of land, fenced off, with a generally open character and appearance, but for two advertising hoardings to the rear. The site fronts onto Station Road, and a well-used path runs behind it, above the railway to the rear. The wider area has a mix of residential properties, with a more commercial character towards and beyond the railway station. The station and the development which adjoins the railway has an open, low-rise character which contrasts with taller development on the opposite side of the road and further away from the station. The site abuts but is not within the CA and is visible in the context of the station in longer views along Station Road.
5. The proposed office building, with undercroft parking, flat-roofed dormers to the front and a substantial flat-roofed two-storey element to the rear would be clearly visible in the street-scene and the surrounding area and would be a prominent addition. I consider that this would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, as it would appear over-dominant and out-of-scale

- with the buildings surrounding it. In addition, the appeal proposal would present a large, unrelieved, blank elevation to the station and longer views along Station Road. As I have noted, both sides of Station Road have a different character, with the station and its surroundings being generally smaller scale and more open. The scale of development generally increases from the station, through the appeal site and on to neighbouring properties.
6. The London Borough of Havering Gidea Park Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Proposals describes the significance of the CA as being its unique character, layout and variety of design, arising from its history as a Garden Suburb intended to demonstrate the improvement in modern housing and to assist in the raising of living standards.
 7. Whilst I accept that the site is not within the CA, it is clearly within its setting and currently has a neutral effect upon it. I acknowledge that the area around the station is less cohesive than other parts of the CA. However, the proposal would, by virtue of its scale and bulk appear incongruous. It would, in my opinion erode the open character of the area around the station and that part of the CA, bringing taller and bulkier development closer to the generally single-storey, lower scale and spacious edge of the CA.
 8. As a result of its effect on the setting, the proposal would neither preserve nor enhance the CA and would cause less than substantial harm to its significance. I note that the appellant has identified public benefits arising from the proposal in respect of tidying up the site and providing office accommodation with parking, and that there are no consultee or third party objections. However, these benefits are limited in scale and there is no suggestion that the appeal proposal is the only or optimum viable use of the site. Having regard to the great weight to be given to the conservation of the CA as a heritage asset, I do not consider those limited benefits outweigh the harm I have identified.
 9. I note that the relatively recent office building adjacent to this site is of a similar height and shares some design features. However, the appeal proposal is taller and substantially wider, with a very different style of fenestration and an undercroft parking area. These further add to the incongruity of the proposal and the harm that it causes. I consider that the proposal would diminish the open and spacious character of the area and harm its character and appearance. I do not consider the neighbouring building sets an irresistible precedent for the appeal proposal in light of the harm I have identified.
 10. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policies DC61 and DC68 of the London Borough of Havering Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document, 2008 and the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework. These seek, amongst other things to ensure that development maintains, enhances or improves the character and appearance of an area, responds appropriately to its character in respect of scale and height, and conserves and enhances the historic environment.

Conclusion

11. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

S Dean

INSPECTOR