



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 November 2019

by Julia Gregory BSc(Hons) BTP MRTPI MCMI

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

Decision date: 06 December 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/Z3825/W/19/3234521

The Walled Garden, St Joseph's Abbey, Storrington, West Sussex RH20 4GJ

- 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 Benjamin Wilson against the decision of Horsham District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/19/0710, dated 28 March 2019, was refused by notice dated 7 June 2019.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a two storey three bedroom detached dwelling with two parking spaces.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Storrington Conservation Area, the effect on the setting of St Joseph's Abbey, a grade II listed building, and the effect on the Ginkgo biloba trees on the site.

Reasons

3. The dwelling would be sited within Storrington Conservation Area and within the grounds of St Joseph's Abbey, a grade II listed building. The Abbey is of considerable size and has been converted to dwellings. It stands within extensive residential shared grounds.
4. Storrington Conservation Area has a mixture of buildings of various sizes and ages but the Abbey, rebuilt in the nineteenth century in gothic revival style and its grounds and the listed parish church to the south form an extensive part of the historic fabric of the Conservation Area. The grounds form a verdant undeveloped area which along with the churchyard are strongly positive open features. Whilst I note the location of the modern estate to the north east this is outside the conservation area.
5. The surviving walled garden and associated open space and 2 ginkgo biloba trees positively contribute to the setting of the principal listed building and the conservation area allowing the appreciation of the historic evolution of the site, and the encompassing grounds around the Abbey. The walled garden can be viewed through a wrought iron gate facing towards the public car park to the

- south. The garden has already been significantly eroded by the construction of the garage blocks.
6. The design of the dwelling would replicate that at No 8 in the Mews at the southern end of St Joseph's Abbey Estate. It would also pay reference in its proportions to No 1 on the other side of the garages. Nonetheless, it would be located on land that is physically isolated, to the rear of modern garages separated as a discrete area of garden with no previous development brought to my attention.
 7. Although the appellant indicates that the ground level would be reduced by some 1m there is limited information to be able to assess how the dwelling would relate in elevation to the garages close by. The dwelling would have a height of some 6.7m which would be substantially taller than the height of the garages. That would fail to be subservient to the Abbey or to be adequately screened.
 8. The dwelling would be sited close to the boundary wall and the plan indicates that the building would project significantly above the garden wall. Given that the building would measure some 13.5m wide by at maximum some 10m deep the building would harmfully assert itself on this discreet area of garden.
 9. Given that Storrington Churchyard is on much higher land I do not also accept that the dwelling would be satisfactorily screened from its surroundings outside the Abbey grounds.
 10. Furthermore, the incising of the dwelling and significant hard surfaced areas for access to and around the building in addition to that for car parking would lead to retention of what would amount to oddly shaped retained elevated areas and the engineering operations would further erode the character of the garden.
 11. The building would be positioned within the western portion of the site, with a front garden as the only meaningful amenity space. For that reason, there could be pressure for screening or separation by planting to close off this area further harming the connection to the Abbey grounds. Access between the land and the grounds and the land and the public car park would also be likely separated off from shared areas around the Abbey.
 12. The garden would be dominated by two tall Ginkgo biloba trees, the tallest being some 18m high with the dwelling some 12m almost due west. I acknowledge that they would be relatively close to the dwelling, but they are in good condition with their root protection zones not significantly impinged. Given their relatively limited crown spread, I am satisfied that this would not be such a close proximity that it would be unreasonable to expect occupiers to live close by because of shading or that this would cause apprehension to future occupiers.
 13. Nonetheless, the proposal would erode the sense of space and tranquillity that currently surrounds the Abbey and the area in general. The scheme would not respect the identity of the conservation area as advocated by the Framework.
 14. Although I note the previous schemes and appeal decisions¹, I have limited information about those schemes. Whilst the appellant says that he has sought

¹ 2002 refusal and APP/Z3825/W/17/3174731 and 3184570

to address previous reasons for refusal and appeal decisions, this proposal is to be determined on its individual merits.

15. For the reasons given above, the development would fail to preserve the setting of the Abbey and it would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. The development would conflict with Policies 33 and 34 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (excluding South Downs National Park) of 2015.
16. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) identifies that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Where a development proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits, including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
17. I consider that whilst there would be significant harm to the setting of the Abbey, the harm would be less than substantial, given that the development would not affect the listed building's physical fabric. There would also be less than substantial harm to the Conservation Area given the substantial extent of the Conservation Area. I accord the less than substantial harm to heritage assets great weight.
18. Turning to public benefits. A new dwelling would be provided within a small town with a range of facilities. The appellant has argued that it would enable the repair and upkeep of the walls of the garden. Little evidence has been provided that the walls are in poor condition or in respect of any costs of their upkeep. Whilst unused, the land is grassed but seemed well maintained at the time of my visit. These matters have some limited weight. I acknowledge also that the siting of the dwelling would not harm outlook and light levels in neighbouring properties, which amounts to an absence of harm.
19. I conclude that the limited public benefits would not outweigh the great weight to the harm to heritage assets identified.

Conclusions

20. For the reasons given above, and having considered all matters raised, including the concerns of residents in St Joseph's Abbey, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Julia Gregory

Inspector