
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 February 2020

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24th March 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Q4245/W/19/3241169
203 Cross Street, Sale M33 7JR

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Investment Properties (North West) Ltd against the decision of Trafford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 97592/OUT/19, dated 26 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 13 November 2019.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing building and erection of three-storey self-storage building (B8 use) together with associated parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application was made in outline with access, appearance, layout and scale to be considered at this stage. Accordingly, I have had regard to the submitted plans insofar as they are relevant to determination of the appeal.
3. The draft Unilateral Undertaking (UU) submitted with the appeal would facilitate a financial contribution towards off-site tree planting. However, the UU is incomplete as it is not signed. Furthermore, in its evidence the Council states that there is no policy requirement in this regard. Consequently, I have not taken the draft UU into account in my assessment.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site comprises a single storey commercial unit with hardstanding, formerly used as a car sales showroom and associated parking area. It is located on the outskirts of Sale between the River Mersey and the A56 Cross Street, at the interface between the urban area and the Green Belt and the verdant countryside. It shares an access from the A56 with the neighbouring petrol filling station and commercial/ industrial estate.
6. The area that includes the appeal site is characterised by single storey industrial and commercial buildings with large areas of hardstanding. Heading towards the M60 motorway, there is a modern hotel complex several storeys high finished in brick with extensive glazing to all elevations. Heading away

- from the site in the direction of Sale, the area beyond the industrial and commercial area is characterised by predominantly traditional modest terraced properties in commercial and residential use. The varied mix of ages, styles, sizes and uses of buildings results in a mixed character and appearance.
7. The proposal is the demolition of the appeal building and the construction of a 3 storey self-storage unit, associated parking and loading spaces and the reconfiguration of the internal access route. The building would be a little over 12m in height. It would be predominantly finished in grey metal cladding, with full height glazing on opposing diagonal corners to the front and rear elevations. The glazed section to the rear would be surrounded by yellow cladding, and there would be 2 yellow loading bay doors in the rear elevation.
 8. There is no dispute that the appeal site is in an employment area for the purposes of the current development plan and the Council's emerging draft Land Allocations Plan (January 2014). Consequently, the proposed B8 storage use would accord with the Council's aims for the Local Employment Area and the proposal is therefore acceptable in principle.
 9. Trafford Council's Supplementary Planning Document SPD2: A56 Corridor Development Guidelines Adopted March 2007 (the SPD2) identifies that development on the boundary with the Green Belt and the river valley provides a visual gateway and transition from the nearby M60 motorway interchange. The visual experience travelling along the A56 is therefore one of the most important aspects in presenting the borough as an attractive place, and this comprises both the street scene and short and long-range views and vistas.
 10. The height of the proposal would be in keeping with the general scale of buildings along the A56, which the SPD2 notes is roughly 3 storeys. However, while it would not be a significantly tall monolithic building, it would not relate well to its immediate surroundings which are characterised by single storey and low buildings. When viewed from the road or from locations near the river and in the countryside to the rear, the relatively narrow and tall front and rear elevations would be out of scale and out of proportion with the surrounding built environment. Consequently, in the local context, the proposal would be an incongruous and conspicuously tall feature.
 11. The long and predominantly blank side elevations would be a conspicuous bulk of development. The solid grey panels, with or without a feature colour to highlight the building's entrance, would not be sympathetic to the colour palette or design of the surrounding built environment. It would be an overtly contemporary building that would be visually obtrusive in the immediate built context and also in longer views across the area, when it would also be seen in combination with the more distant taller predominantly brick and glazed buildings.
 12. While a small number of trees could be planted near to the parking spaces at the side of the building, these would not provide any meaningful screening or softening of the outline of the building. Although set back from the road, the building would not be assimilated into its surroundings and it would be a prominent feature in this location. The proposal would not contribute to a sense of place and it would not improve the character or quality of the area.
 13. Therefore, the proposal would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with Policy L7 of the Trafford Local

Plan Core Strategy Adopted January 2012. It would also conflict with the guidance in Trafford Council's Supplementary Planning Document SPD2: A56 Corridor Development Guidelines Adopted March 2007 and the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework that require development to be high quality and good design that takes opportunities to improve the overall character and quality of the area.

Other Considerations

14. There are 3 and 4 storey buildings elsewhere in the area including Cavendish House and Dalton House, which is at the junction of Cross Street and Dane Road. However, these are located some distance from the appeal site and on the opposite side of the A56, which is a multi-lane road at this point. Consequently, they are widely separated from and they do not provide a visual context for the appeal scheme. Furthermore, the SPD2 notes that within the gateway locations, which include the Cross Street/ Dane Road area, high quality buildings of larger scale and mass may be appropriate. Therefore, similarly tall or taller buildings elsewhere, some of which will have been approved in a different policy context, are not directly comparable to the appeal scheme and they do not provide a justification for it.
15. My attention has been drawn to a recent proposal at Crossford Court (ref 98606/FUL/19) that relates to an increase in height of existing buildings. Crossford Court does not provide a visual context for the appeal scheme. Moreover, that proposal differs from the appeal scheme in a number of ways including the nature of the scheme, the existing site and its relationship to its surroundings and its benefits which would include a contribution to affordable housing and to the Council's 5 year supply of housing. Furthermore, while the Council may be minded to approve it, planning permission has not yet been granted. Therefore, it does not weigh in favour of the appeal scheme.
16. In 2017, the Council provided pre-application advice in relation to a large scheme at the appeal site that included a self-storage unit, an apartment building and a multi-storey car park. Although no concerns were raised in relation to the proposed self-storage unit, the advice related to a substantially different scheme and which would contribute to the Council's 5 year housing land supply. In any case, the Planning Practice Guidance is clear that pre-application advice cannot pre-empt the democratic decision making process in the event that a formal planning application is made. Therefore, the pre-application advice is not a justification for the appeal scheme.
17. There are policies in the Framework relating to the provision for storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations, making effective use of land, and the substantial weight that should be given to using suitable brownfield land within settlements. However, compliance with some policies in the Framework and the development plan does not provide a justification for a scheme that would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area.
18. The proposal would result in economic benefits during the construction phase, although these would be temporary and therefore limited. The proposal would not create a high number of employment opportunities. I accept that it would provide storage facilities for small businesses based elsewhere. However, there is little before me to demonstrate that there would be any significant benefits

arising from a self-storage unit in this location, either in terms of direct or indirect employment or wider economic benefits.

19. The appeal site is in an accessible location. However, given the nature of the proposal, I am not persuaded that it would contribute to the objectives in the Framework that relate to minimising the need to travel, promoting sustainable transport modes or contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation.
20. The proposal would re-use a vacant brownfield site. However, although there is reference to extensive marketing, there is little substantive evidence that reasonable attempts have been made to let or sell the premises at a reasonable rate. Moreover, I am not persuaded there are no alternatives proposals that would re-use the site without conflict with the development plan.
21. Amendments were made to the proposals during the time that the application was being considered. The appellant would also be willing for the materials, specifically the feature yellow cladding, to be controlled by planning condition. Nevertheless, I am not persuaded that the adverse visual impact of the proposal could be satisfactorily mitigated.
22. Matters relating to site investigation for contamination, surface and foul water disposal, and control of emissions during construction could be addressed by planning condition. There would be no adverse impacts on biodiversity, neighbouring occupiers or highways. These are requirements of the development plan. Neither they nor the absence of third party objections to the scheme are matters that weigh in favour of the proposal.
23. I note the third party concerns in respect of the right of access at the site. This is a private legal matter and it is not a matter for the appeal to address.

Conclusion

24. I have found that the proposal would conflict with the development plan and there are no material considerations that would outweigh that conflict. For this reason, the appeal should therefore be dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR