



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 February 2020

by Christopher Miell MPlan MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1st April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/W/19/3241808

Kits Coty, 25 Westfield Road, Westfield, Woking GU22 9NA

- 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 Mrs Louise McElhinney against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PLAN/2019/0466, dated 10 February 2019, was refused by notice dated 2 September 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as 'Extensions and alterations to existing dwelling and subdivision to provide 2x semi-detached dwellings on site'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The appellant has submitted a completed unilateral undertaking as part of the appeal, which seeks to overcome the second reason for refusal on the Council's decision notice. I return to this matter later in this Decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the development upon the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is occupied by a detached single-storey bungalow, which is positioned on the corner of Westfield Road and Apers Avenue. It is proposed to alter and extend the existing building to form a pair of two-storey semi-detached dwellings.
5. The surrounding area has a suburban residential character and the dwellings on Westfield Road are laid out in a linear pattern behind large front gardens, which typically provide off-street parking. On the southern side of Westfield Road, where the appeal site is located, the properties are predominately detached dwellings, whereas on the northern side of Westfield Road, the properties are predominately semi-detached dwellings. Despite the different property types on either side of Westfield Road, the existing dwellings are typically set within generous plots with large front and rear gardens. This creates a spacious character which contributes positively to the local distinctiveness of the area.

6. Immediately to the rear of the appeal site there is an existing infill development which fronts onto Apers Avenue. The development was formed by severing the original rear garden of the appeal property to provide an additional dwelling. Despite the historic plot sub-division, the existing dwelling at the appeal site still retains a good-sized plot and therefore it accords with the prevailing pattern of development and the local area's spacious character.
7. Despite the alignment of the proposed dwellings with the existing building line, the proposed development would result in the creation of two smaller plots at the appeal site. Whilst the rear gardens would provide a suitable amount of outdoor space for future occupants, the limited sizes of the plots would be a significant departure from the prevailing pattern of development in the local area and out of keeping with the area's spacious character.
8. The limited width of the proposed plots would be readily apparent from Westfield Road due to the presence of two separate front garden areas and the greater degree of off-street parking likely to be associated with two dwellings, as opposed to one property. Furthermore, the external appearance of the proposed dwellings with two front doors facing the road would draw attention to the smaller plots. As such, the proposed development would have a cramped appearance and would be a discordant form of development which would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area.
9. The appellant explains that the density of the proposed development and plot widths would be similar to other residential developments in the wider area. In addition, my attention has been drawn to the varied nature of the wider street context, which includes a shopping parade and flatted development. Whilst I acknowledge that there are variety of building types within the wider area, along the stretch of Westfield Road where the appeal site is located, the existing residential properties are typically detached or semi-detached dwelling set within generous plots. As such, I have afforded the other developments limited weight in my considerations.
10. The appellant argues that the proposed development would provide an additional dwelling within a built-up area without the loss of green space. To this regard, I recognise that paragraph 122(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') states that planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change. In this instance, I have found that the proposal would not maintain the area's prevailing character.
11. Moreover, based on the evidence before me, the appeal site is not within an area where the development plan specifically promotes regeneration and change. Indeed, I note that the Woking Design Supplementary Planning Document (February 2015) explains that the appeal site is located within the 'Inter-war/immediate post war' character area and that developments within this character area often have the largest areas of open space, which should be protected.

12. My attention has been drawn to an extant planning permission¹ at the appeal site which permits alterations and extensions to the existing dwelling. The bulk, scale, mass and overall appearance of the approved development is similar to the current proposal. In addition, the appellant explains that a similar number of occupants could reside in the extended house, when compared to the likely number of occupants of the proposed development. Whilst this may be the case, the approved development would not result in the sub-division of the appeal site to form two smaller plots and thus it would maintain the area's spacious character. Accordingly, the extant planning permission does not provide a compelling reason for allowing the appeal.
13. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. As such, the proposal would not accord with Policy CS10 of the Woking Core Strategy (October 2012) (the 'CS') which states that higher density developments above the Council's guidance will be permitted in principle where they can be justified in terms of the sustainability of the location and where the character of an area would not be compromised.
14. In addition, the proposal would not accord with Policy CS21 of the CS and Policy DM10 of the Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (October 2016), which require new development to respect and make a positive contribution to the street scene and the character of the area; and to avoid the inappropriate sub-division of existing curtilages to a size substantially below that prevailing in the area. Accordingly, the proposal would also be inconsistent with paragraph 127(c) of the Framework, which requires development to be sympathetic to the local character.

Other Matters

15. The appeal site is located within five kilometres of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (the 'SPA'). In accordance with the Council's Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance Strategy 2010-2015 the appellant has submitted a unilateral undertaking which would secure a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring contribution to mitigate the potential impacts of the proposed development on the SPA. However, notwithstanding the submitted unilateral undertaking, as I have concluded that the proposed development would conflict with other development plan policies, and given my findings on the first main issue, this is not a matter I need to address. For this reason, I have not undertaken an appropriate assessment.
16. I note that there have not been any objections from interested third parties or statutory consultees. However, this does not outweigh or alter my conclusions on the main issue.
17. The appeal is supported by a letter from a local estate agent which states that the proposed dwellings would meet an existing need for family housing in the local area. In addition, the proposed development incorporates solar panels, which would provide a renewable source of energy and help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Whilst these matters weigh positively in favour of the development, they are not significant enough to alter or outweigh my conclusions on the main issue.

¹ Council Ref: PLAN/2018/0151

Conclusion

18. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Christopher Miell

INSPECTOR