
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 May 2020

by Martin Small, BA (Hons), BPI, DipCM, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29th May 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/D1265/D/20/3246940

164 Springdale Road, Corfe Mullen, Wimborne, BH21 3QN

- 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 & Mrs D Snook against the decision of Dorset Council.
 - The application Ref: 3/19/1279/HOU dated 31 May 2019, was refused by notice dated 5 December 2019.
 - The development is described as a 'fence to front boundary (Retrospective)'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The development is described on the application form as 'retrospective' and I observed during my site visit that the fence has been erected. I have determined the appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

4. Springdale Road is a long, predominantly residential road with the appeal property close to its western end. Along this section there are dwellings on the north side set back from the road with gardens or hard standings to the frontages and an area of open space to the south side.
5. There is a variety of boundary treatments along the full length of Springdale Road to which the appellants have drawn my attention and which I observed during my site visit. Although there are some properties with high fences and / or boundaries without vegetation, in the vicinity of the appeal property the front boundaries are predominantly vegetated in some way, many with high hedges and others with substantial planting. This vegetation, together with the trees and open land to the south side of the road, give this section of Springdale Road an attractive verdant character and appearance.
6. The fence comprises close boarded panels approximately 1.85 m high set between substantial posts approximately 2.15 m high sited along the back edge of the footway. Although not as high as some of the hedges and fencing in the vicinity and elsewhere along Springdale Road, the fence is a substantial hard structure that appears as an incongruous feature in the street scene, at

- odds with the prevailing character and appearance of this section of Springdale Road. The posts are particularly incongruous, being tall, projecting significantly forward of the panels and of an unusual formal design with grill infill panels and prominent fastenings.
7. From my observations during my site visit, the materials and construction of the fence are of high quality. I accept that the fence will weather over time and that a condition requiring its painting or staining a muted colour could be attached were planning permission to be granted. However, these attributes / measures are not sufficient to make the fence visually acceptable within the street scene.
 8. I also noted the provision of a planter between two of the posts and some other planting during my site visit. I acknowledge the appellants' stated intention to provide more planters to soften the appearance of the fence. However, with a very narrow area for planting between the panels and the footway, the scope for planting to soften the fence is limited. I am not persuaded therefore that this planting, even in combination with painting or staining, would satisfactorily ameliorate the appearance of the fence.
 9. The appellants suggest that the replacement of hedges with fencing or other boundary treatments reflects the changing style of more modern homes and cite the redevelopment of 160 Springdale Road (No. 160) and other properties along the road as precedents in this respect. However, the character and appearance of the area remains attractively verdant. Both national and local planning policy seek to protect character and appearance.
 10. The appellants draw my attention to the Council's acceptance of the alterations to the dwelling at No. 160 despite being "*somewhat different to the dwellings to east and west*". Whilst I do not have the full details of these alterations, this comment relates to the design of the dwelling rather than the boundary treatment and it is not clear to me whether alterations to the boundary treatment formed part of that development.
 11. In any event, from my observations during my site visit, the picket fence to the front boundary of No. 160 is lower and not as solid as the fence before me and therefore has a lesser effect on the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, the alterations to No. 160 do not set a precedent for the fence before me. I have no details of other planning applications in Springdale Road and it is not for me to comment on any lack of conditions regarding boundary treatments for proposals that are not before me.
 12. I therefore conclude that, in combination, the height, extent, solidity, design and positioning of the fence is harmful to the character and appearance of the section of Springdale Road in which the appeal site is located. In this respect the erection of the fence is therefore contrary to Policy HE2 of the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan Part 1 - Core Strategy 2014. The policy sets out that the design of new development must be of high quality and will be permitted if it is compatible with or improves its surroundings in, amongst other things, height, materials and visual impact.
 13. Paragraph 127 c) of the National Planning Policy Framework requires planning decisions to ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character, whilst not preventing or discouraging appropriate change. As I find the fence not to be appropriate, it also conflicts with the Framework in this respect.

Other Matters

14. The appellants claim that the removal of the previous hedge to the front boundary of the appeal property has improved visibility for vehicles entering or exiting the appeal property and its neighbouring property and has improved access for users of the footway. I accept that the fence does not encroach onto the footway. However, notwithstanding the appellants' contended difficulties with maintaining the previous hedge, it appears to me that these benefits could have been achieved through regular trimming of the hedge or could be achieved by a more appropriate design of fence.
15. I note the appellants' desire to keep wildlife from the open space opposite their property out of their garden and to provide security. Nevertheless, I am not persuaded that the fence before me is the only way of providing an easily maintainable barrier. I therefore give these matters limited weight as justification for the fence before me.
16. I acknowledge that the Highways Authority raised no objection to the fence. However, I note that the Highways Authority has not positively supported the replacement of the previous hedge with the fence. The Highways Authority's position therefore represents an absence of planning harm in relation to highway matters rather than a benefit of the fence. I thus give this position neutral weight in my determination of this appeal.
17. Accordingly, none of these matters outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of the area that I have identified. I accept that, from the evidence before me, no objections to the fence have been raised by the occupiers of any of the neighbouring properties, but I have no evidence of any support for the development as suggested by the appellants. Furthermore, I note that Corfe Mullen Parish Council objects to the fence on the grounds of its height.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons given above, and having had regard to the other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Martin Small

INSPECTOR