
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 June 2020

by Benjamin Webb BA(Hons) MA MA MSc PGDip(UD) MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 June 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/V1260/W/19/3242070
51-53 Victoria Crescent, Poole BH12 2JQ

- 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 Whitelock and Co against the decision of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council.
 - The application Ref APP/19/01033/F, dated 7 August 2019, was refused by notice dated 3 October 2019.
 - The development proposed is demolish existing buildings and erect a block of 8 no 2 bedroom flats with parking, bin and cycle storage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - whether the occupants of the development would have access to sustainable means of travel.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The site is located at the northernmost junction of Victoria Crescent with Churchill Road. Ground levels rise steeply to the south of the site and fall to the north. Both topography and the location of the plot give the site visual prominence in near views, and in long views towards the north and north west. High-level views are available across the site from the south.
4. The site's principal frontage lies along Victoria Crescent, which contains a mix of predominantly detached and semi-detached 2-storey dwellings which are reasonably well spaced. These include a run of several largely matching semi-detached dwellings immediately to the east of the site. Adjacent parts of Churchill Road contain similar buildings, albeit the mix here also includes a scattering of single storey bungalows and some linked dwellings. Building designs vary, but modest scale, form and mass, and simple roof shapes which terminate in a ridge are consistent themes both within the immediate setting of the site, and within the broader townscape. The buildings currently on site conform with this pattern.

5. The proposed building would not be any greater in height than its nearest neighbour in Victoria Crescent. The footprint would however be significantly larger than that of any other building within the immediate setting, and the accommodation would extend across 3 storeys. This would necessitate use of a roof which would be flat beyond its outer edges, producing an atypically heavy form of equally atypical shape, in each regard this would be accentuated by use of a relatively low eaves line, and installation of dormers; the latter virtually absent from development within the local context.
6. The resulting scale and mass of the building would appear uncharacteristically large and bulky. This would be visually emphasised in contrast with the sequence of semi-detached dwellings to the east, and made more apparent by the site's high level of visual prominence, given the views towards, over and around the proposed building that would exist. This would not be alleviated in any meaningful way by the proposed materials, elevational treatment, irregular footprint or corner location, as none would alter the fact that the building would be perceived as a single entity, whose scale and mass was clearly at odds with that of development within its setting. The building would appear obtrusive within the street scene for these reasons.
7. Insofar as the decision notice references the loss of gaps, it is clear that only one gap would be lost: that currently between Nos 51 and 53. In the first instance this gap would be lost due to the demolition of Nos 51 and 53. The gap itself holds no particular quality. It is however clear that the issue is less the loss of the gap, than the way in which the development would be distributed across the site. Thus, whereas the 2 dwellings currently on site are spaced, and this spacing, in combination with the modest proportion and massing of existing built form reflects a general pattern, the proposed building would be a single bulky mass which would not.
8. The decision notice additionally makes reference to plot coverage and building width. The appellant has sought to show that considered in these limited terms the development would not be wholly atypical. A number of buildings have indeed been drawn to my attention. Some of these are nearby, but others, including terraces to the north, are a sufficient distance from the site that they do not directly inform the character or appearance of its immediate setting. None in any case directly resembles the building form proposed when considered and viewed in three dimensions, which is where harm would arise.
9. I acknowledge that the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) seeks to promote development that makes efficient use of land. However, this is subject to a number of considerations which include the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character. In this regard the appeal scheme would fail.
10. For the reasons outlined above I conclude that the development would have an unacceptably adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with Policy PP27 of the Poole Local Plan 2018 (the LP) which requires a good standard of design in all new developments which amongst other things reflects or enhances local patterns, including in terms of scale, bulk and massing; and Policy PP28 of the LP which requires that the scale and massing of flattened developments, including the roof profile, is in keeping with neighbouring buildings and the established pattern.

Transport

11. The Decision Notice indicates that the development would be located outside a sustainable transport corridor, but little further assessment is provided within the Council's submissions.
12. The supporting text of Policy PP2 of the LP indicates that sustainable transport corridors are areas located within 400 metres of the bus stop with a regular service, or 500 metres from a railway station. Whilst Policy PP2 encourages the majority of new housing to be located within these areas, development outside is also permitted. This is provided that sustainable transport measures are incorporated, connecting the development with town, district and local centres as an alternative to reliance upon the car.
13. Though the nearest bus stop is less than 400 metres from the site, the bus stop offering the most regular and wide-ranging services is located around 720 metres from the site. This is almost twice the distance noted in Policy PP2. The site is however within an urban location directly linked to the rest of the settlement by lit pavements and roads. A range of services, including a supermarket and numerous shops, are located along Ashley Road to the south. These could be reached by bicycle in around 5 – 10 minutes, notwithstanding some level changes along the route. In this regard cycle storage would be provided on site, helping to enable the occupants of the development to travel in this way.
14. A range of services and facilities including the Ashley Road shops, could also be reached from the site within around 10 – 15 minutes by walking. This is again notwithstanding some level changes along the route. Occupants of the development would have direct access to the pavement outside, and in this regard there are no other obvious measures that could be taken within the design of the development to encourage walking.
15. For the reasons outlined above I conclude that future occupants of the development would have satisfactory access to sustainable means of travel. The development would therefore comply with Policy PP2 of the LP as outlined above.

Other Matters

16. The lack of avoidance/mitigation for identified likely significant effects that the development would have on the integrity of the Dorset Heathlands Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar sites; the Dorset Heaths Special Area of Conservation; and the Poole Harbour SPA and Ramsar sites, was also given as a reason for refusal of planning permission. In line with local policy, which seeks contributions towards mitigation measures, in combination with funding via the Community Infrastructure Levy, the appellant has made a payment during the course of the appeal. The Council has accordingly withdrawn its objection. Had I been minded to allow the appeal, and the circumstances therefore existed in which planning permission could be granted, it would have been necessary for me to examine this matter further. However as I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons, no further consideration is required.
17. The appellant indicates that the development would diversify the local housing mix. However, I have no information relating to what the mix is at present, and

whether any local need would be served by diversification. Consequently, I can attach little weight to this consideration.

18. I acknowledge that paragraph 68 of the Framework states that great weight should be given to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes. However, whilst the site is clearly suitable for housing given that it is already in this use, the proposed development is not suited to the site. Consequently paragraph 68 does not lend support in favour of the scheme.
19. The development would provide 6 additional units, generating some limited economic benefits during construction, and through use of local services by future occupants. The combined benefits would not however outweigh the harm that would be caused to the character and appearance of the area.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons outlined above I find that whilst future occupants of the development would have satisfactory access to sustainable means of travel, the development itself would have an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area, contrary to the development plan. As there are no other considerations which outweigh this finding, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Benjamin Webb

INSPECTOR