



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 June 2020

by A Caines BSc(Hons) MSc TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 June 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/20/3244753

10 Wellfield Gardens, Alnmouth, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 2SE

- 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 Stephen Willcox against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 19/01550/FUL, dated 14 May 2019, was refused by notice dated 15 July 2019.
 - The development proposed is extension and conversion of garage to create two-bedroom dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The appeal site lies within the Alnmouth Conservation Area (ACA). Notwithstanding the Council's refusal reasons, my statutory duties require me to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the ACA. I sought further comments from the appellant on this matter and have taken them into account in determining this appeal.

Main Issues

3. In light of the above, the main issues are i) whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the ACA, and ii) the effect of the development on the living conditions of the occupiers of 7 Alnwood, with particular regard to outlook.

Reasons

Conservation Area

4. Wellfield Gardens is a relatively modern residential cul de sac, which sits between the B1338 and Alnwood in the northern part of the ACA. The Alnmouth Conservation Area Appraisal identifies that this part of the ACA mainly represents the 20th century expansion of the settlement. It has a spacious and pleasant suburban character with dispersed building groups and many established garden trees and hedges. The spacious and verdant character of this part of the ACA is a contrast to the densely built up historic core along Northumberland Street and I consider this to be an important element of the significance of the ACA. The Wellfield Gardens development is

typical of this character and there is no evidence before me to support the appellant's claims that it would be excluded from the ACA boundary.

5. Policy S15 of the Alnwick District Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2007 (CS) requires that all development involving built and historic assets, including conservation areas, preserve and where appropriate, enhance the asset for the future. In addition, Policy S16 of the CS and Policy BE8 in conjunction with Appendix A 'Design and Layout of New Dwellings' of the Alnwick District Wide Local Plan 1997 (LP) set criteria for new development, including that it should achieve a high standard of design and take account of the relationship to open spaces, other buildings and the local architectural style.
6. The garage block is situated at the end of the cul de sac, backed by mature trees along the western boundary. It is a single storey pitched roof building of four garages. A small open grassed area separates it from the properties of Alnwood to the south, which have short rear gardens and sit close to the boundary.
7. Extending the garage block to the south would bring it in very close proximity to the properties of Alnwood, thereby reducing the sense of openness at the end of the cul de sac. The hipped roof design would not make any meaningful difference in this respect and would unbalance the form of the building. In addition, the new windows and front entrance door would appear wholly at odds with the remaining garages, and together with the hipped roof, would result in an overall visually disjointed elevation to Wellfield Gardens, notwithstanding the use of matching materials in the extension. Neighbours have also drawn my attention to the proximity of the rear projection to a mature tree, which I observed contributes to the verdant character of the area. Even if it could be protected during construction, there is no evidence before me to demonstrate that the development would avoid harmful impacts to the long term health and longevity of the tree. For all these reasons, the development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the host building and its surroundings. In doing so it would also cause harm to the character and appearance of this part of the ACA.
8. In reasoning the above, I acknowledge that the development would not be subject to widespread view beyond Wellfield Gardens and the immediate neighbouring properties. Irrespective, the requirement for development proposals to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the ACA applies with equal force whether or not the proposal is prominent. I have also had regard to the consultation comments of the Council's Conservation Officer; however, I am not bound by that advice and for the reasons set out above, I have identified harm to the ACA.
9. Owing to the nature of the identified impact and its localised extent, the harm to the character and appearance of the ACA would be 'less than substantial' in the parlance of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). However, any harm to a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification. Furthermore, heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.
10. In accordance with the Framework, the 'less than substantial' harm to the ACA should be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme. In this case, it is

recognised that a new dwelling would add to the supply and choice of housing in the area, but at a very small scale. This modest public benefit would not convincingly outweigh the harm that would be caused to the ACA, a matter to which I have attached great weight.

11. I therefore conclude that the development would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the ACA. The less than substantial harm would not be outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme. The proposal would therefore be contrary to CS Policy S15 and the Framework in this regard. It is also contrary to CS Policy 16, LP Policy BE8 and the Framework, where they seek good design.

Living conditions

12. The properties in Alnwood lie to the south of the appeal site and as I have already alluded to, have short rear gardens. The closest property is No 7. Its rear windows, including a conservatory extension, face the appeal site at close proximity.
13. The plans indicate that the development would be located some 2.5m from the boundary fence with No7. It would not be any higher than the existing building, but it would be significantly closer and wider along the boundary. Even with a gap to the boundary and a hipped roof, the scale and proximity of the development would have a significant overbearing and enclosing effect on the rear outlook and garden of No 7. The proposed landscaping along the boundary may, in time, help to screen the development from view, but at that point would itself have an overbearing and enclosing effect on the rear outlook and garden of No 7, so does not overcome my concerns.
14. I conclude, on this issue, that the development would have an unacceptable effect on the living conditions of the occupiers of 7 Alnwood, with regard to outlook. This is contrary to LP Policy CD32 in so far as it resists development which would cause demonstrable harm to the amenity of residential areas. It is also contrary to the Framework with regards to ensuring a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.

Other Matters

15. The site is within the coastal zone of influence of nationally (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and internationally (Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, and Ramsar Sites) designated sites. Had the proposal been acceptable in planning terms, it would have been necessary for me to have undertaken an Appropriate Assessment. However, as I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons, it is not necessary for me to consider this matter any further, as any findings in this respect would not change the appeal outcome.
16. Alnmouth lies within the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation. I am cognisant of the statutory duty under section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which requires that decisions have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. I have also had regard to the AONB Partnership comments. Notwithstanding my findings in relation to the effect on the ACA, I am satisfied that the effects of the development would not extend to the wider

landscape setting of Alnmouth, or prejudice the purposes of the AONB designation.

17. The appellant has questioned the consistency of the Council's decision based on officer support for a previous scheme on the site¹. However, I note that the particular application was ultimately refused by the Council. Irrespective, I am required to determine the appeal on its own merits and have done so.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons set out, I conclude that the proposal would be contrary to the relevant identified policies of the development plan, and the Framework, and therefore the appeal should be dismissed.

A Caines

INSPECTOR

¹ LPA Ref: 18/00839/FUL