
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 June 2020

by Jonathan Hockley BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 July 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/J3720/W/19/3239944

Garage court on land south of Castle Road, Castle Road, Alcester B49 6BQ

- 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 Mixed Up Ltd against the decision of Stratford-on-Avon District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/02169/FUL, dated 1 August 2019, was refused by notice dated 27 September 2019.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of all existing garages and construction of four dwellings, creation of associated parking area and all other associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mixed Up Ltd against Stratford-on-Avon District Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. Prior to the Council making their decision on the application that is the subject of this appeal, the appellant submitted revised plans. The Council declined to consider them, and these are re-submitted as part of the appeal before me. The revised plans essentially alter the positioning of the entrance and the elevations to plot 1, introduce chimneys and 'wet verges' to all four plots and slightly amend parking spaces and the positions of plots 1 & 2. I am clear about the precise differences between the amended and original proposals and consider that there are no substantial differences between the two. I consider that the amended plans do not constitute a change which deprive those who should have been consulted on the changed development of the opportunity of such consultation, noting in this respect that some notification has been made, and have therefore considered such amended plans in my reasoning below.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

5. The appeal site is set within an area of quite dense residential development to the north of Alcester. At the centre of this planned fairly regimented area of development is a semi-circular shaped street, which is split in two by Castle

Road. Development on Castle Road consists of blocks of semi-detached and terraced properties facing directly onto the road; set behind them are two reasonably large garage courts, in the north and south half of the semi-circle. The appeal site consists of the southern garage court.

6. The court was fenced off from public access at the time of my visit and is entered via a single-track access road, which fits tightly between two properties on Castle Road and their close boarded fenced back gardens. This access is reasonably long and opens into the fairly large courtyard. Redundant terraced garages line the north east and south west sides of the court and some concrete hardstanding indicates where some previous garages would have stood in the middle of the area. The courtyard is surrounded on all sides by rear gardens of properties on Kingsley Avenue and Avon Crescent, which make up the southern half of the semi-circular road, and there is an existing sub-station in the south west corner of the Court.
7. The proposal seeks to construct a row of four houses, split into two pairs of semi-detached dwellings. These would be located on the north east half of the court, facing towards the south west, and overlooking the parking and circulation area for the dwellings and a retained access for the substation. The 2-storey brick faced dwellings would be fairly simply designed, with brick string courses between the two storeys and cement cladding between the first and ground floor windows. A thin central chimney stack would be sited between the two dwellings and doors would have small flat canopies. Plot 1 would be slightly varied, with its door housed on the north west gable as opposed to the property's façades and the cement cladding between windows replicated. Small planting areas would be located to the front of the dwellings.
8. Despite the amended positioning of part of the scheme, I consider that when viewing the proposal from Castle Road down the access drive the view that would be presented would largely be of hardstanding, with some of the façades and the narrow planting strip visible. The more varied gable of Plot 1 would not be particularly visible due to its proximity to the rear garden fence of No 33 Castle Road. When walking down the access road, while views of the houses would open up on the left hand side, so would views of the parking and circulation area on the right hand side.
9. The proposal would appear to be visually car dominated, with the wealth of hardstanding on site softened only slightly by the narrow planting strips and green areas at the ends of the parking bays. While the amended plans may improve the previous plans the changes would, I consider, be largely cosmetic; there would be no focal stop to views into the scheme and I do not consider that the scheme would add to the overall quality of the area, be visually attractive or establish a strong sense of place.
10. I appreciate that the site is not a conventional one, and that planning decisions should optimise the potential of sites, including brownfield ones, to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development. I also do not consider that the scheme would lead to issues of highway safety given the narrowness of the access road or see any conflict between the division of public and private space in the layout.
11. However, the design of the scheme in my view would not create an attractive, welcoming or distinctive place to live. While I can appreciate that the drive is fairly long and I note that at present there is no terminated view from Castle

Road, I do not consider that the proposed scheme would alter this view particularly positively; no focal point would be provided from Castle Road by the scheme, at odds with the highly planned character of the area, and from within the site would appear car dominated with a surfeit of hard landscaping.

12. I note evidence regarding anti-social behaviour at the derelict parking area, and also note that the proposal would provide four houses in a sustainable area with resultant social and economic benefits. However, it seems to me that it would be entirely possible for a scheme to be brought forward that would secure similar benefits but with a more comprehensive design solution. In this respect my attention is drawn to a previous approved scheme on the site which presented a block of 3 terraced properties facing towards the north west, with the hipped roof and façade of the end terrace building facing down the access road. While I can appreciate that this approved scheme is not the only way to develop this site and that there are always likely to be some concessions when developing such a site, this demonstrates that alternative schemes could be provided which would overcome the issues that the scheme before me presents.

Other Matters

13. The decision notice also refers to concerns over bin collection, specifically that eight bins can adequately be collected from the site without unacceptable overspill onto the verge/highway or loss of amenity to neighbouring residents, due to the need to move such bins up the drive to be collected from Castle Road. While noting concerns from a local resident and recent supplementary planning guidance, given the specifics of this site that an extant permission exists which would result in some six bins with similar collection issues I am not convinced that this matter raises significant harm.

Conclusions

14. I conclude that the proposed development would have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area. The scheme would be contrary to Core Strategy¹ Policy CS.9, which states that all forms of development will improve the quality of the public realm and enhance the sense of place, reflecting the character and distinctiveness of the locality, with high quality design achieved by ensuring that all development is attractive, sensitive to existing built form, distinctive with buildings designed and positioned to define and enhance a hierarchy of streets and spaces. The proposal would also be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, which states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development.
15. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Jon Hockley

INSPECTOR

¹ Stratford-on-Avon Core Strategy 2011 to 2031