



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 June 2020

by Adrian Hunter BA(Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27th July 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/20/3246499

Land to the rear of 62 & 64 Highfield Park, Wargrave, Berkshire RG10 8LE

- 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 and Mrs John and Julie Dowling against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 192895, dated 13 November 2019, was refused by notice dated 3 January 2020.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing single storey garage/storage buildings ancillary to 62 & 64 Highfield Park and the construction of a new single storey detached dwelling at land to rear of 62 & 64 Highfield Park.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Reasons for refusal four and five deal with issues of trees and biodiversity respectively. I note that further survey work has now been undertaken and supplementary reports submitted with this appeal on these issues. The Council have confirmed they have considered this additional information and concluded that, subject to conditions, they now have no objections on tree or biodiversity grounds. I am also satisfied that the additional information does now adequately deal with the two matters. On this basis, it is considered that reasons for refusal four and five as set out in the decision notice have been overcome.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - The effect of the proposal upon the character and appearance of the area; and
 - The effect on the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring dwellings and the future occupiers of the proposed dwelling with particular regard to privacy and private garden space.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. Highfield Park is characterised by two storey dwellings that are laid out in a regular and uniform pattern. The appeal site forms part of the existing rear gardens of Numbers 62 and 64 Highfield Park which adjoin the Metropolitan

Green Belt. However, it is accessed from Hanover Gardens, which is a cul-de-sac containing five bungalows. Within the site, there are a number of single storey outbuildings and an area of hardstanding, which at the time of my visit was used to store a caravan.

5. The appeal proposal would involve the demolition of the existing outbuildings and erection of a single storey, two bedroom dwelling. To accommodate the proposed development, the gardens of the existing dwellings would be reduced in length.
6. The proposed development would result in a reduction in the size of the plots of the host properties. The alignment of the plot would be perpendicular to those around it. The proposed dwelling would be taller than the existing outbuildings on the site and would occupy a slightly greater footprint. The proposal would therefore have greater mass and bulk than the existing outbuildings on the site. Considering the generally regular and uniform pattern of the surrounding development, the addition of a new dwelling into the rear garden of the two properties, would introduce a form of development, which would fail to respect the context, layout and character of those along Highfield Park. Its presence would be perceptible from surrounding properties and in views along Hanover Gardens. The proposal therefore would fail to respond to the local character or reflect the identity of the surroundings and, as a result, would be an incongruous form of development.
7. I note the presence of properties in Hanover Gardens and the fact that the appeal site would be accessed from this cul-de-sac. However, the layout of Hanover Gardens, compliments the uniform character of the existing development along Highfield Park, and despite two properties being located at right angles, the layout appears as a comprehensive development that maintains the overall uniformity of the surrounding area. In contrast, the appeal proposal, by virtue of its location and the backland nature of the site, would result in a cramped layout, indicative of overdevelopment.
8. There are a number of existing single storey buildings on the appeal site. These buildings are ancillary to the host dwellings and, in their design, appearance and scale, reflect their purpose. By contrast, the appeal proposal would introduce a new residential dwelling, which would be an uncharacteristic form of development given the uniform nature of the surroundings. I therefore do not consider that the presence of the ancillary buildings on the appeal site, overcome the harm I have found.
9. The appeal site lies on the edge of the settlement boundary and within a transition area between the settlement and the open countryside and Green Belt. Within these areas Policy CC02 of the Wokingham Borough Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) (the Local Plan) requires development to respect the transition between the built up area and the open countryside, with Policy TB02 of the Local Plan requiring the protection of the Green Belt from proposals within or conspicuous from it.
10. Due to the rising topography of the land to the north, and despite the presence of existing landscaping along the northern boundary and the design of the building, the proposed dwelling would be visible from the Green Belt. Whilst the property would be seen against the backdrop of the rear of the existing properties along Highfield Park, these are all set some distance away from the boundary, with their open gardens, notwithstanding the presence of ancillary

outbuildings, providing a separation between development and the open landscape. In contrast, the proposed bungalow would be located close to the boundary and due to its bulk and mass, would appear as a prominent, incongruous feature which would detract from the verdant and spacious character of the surrounding area. Moreover, this would be exacerbated by the fact that the dwelling would be taller, larger and have a greater volume than the existing ancillary buildings on the appeal site.

11. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would lead to an adverse effect upon the character and appearance of the area. The proposal, in this regard, would be contrary to Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy; Policies CC01, CC02, TB02 and TB06 of the Local Plan; and the Council's Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2012) (the SPD) and paragraph 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework). These Policies, amongst other matters, seek to ensure that new developments relate well to existing properties, maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment and retain existing character.

Living conditions

12. The proposed dwelling would be positioned perpendicular to the host dwellings, with the lounge window facing towards the host properties. The distance between this window and the 1st floor windows of the host properties, would be less than the recommended separation distance contained within the SPD. Due to the orientation of the proposed dwelling and the distance between the window and the fence, it is likely that the majority of the lounge window would not be hidden by the proposed boundary treatment. Subsequently, there would be substantial potential for mutual overlooking between the host properties and the new dwelling. As a result, the proposal would have a significant adverse effect upon privacy levels.
13. With regards to garden size, the SPD suggests a minimum garden depth of 11m, provided that the space is useable. The proposed rear garden area for the appeal property would be sited directly to the rear of number 64. Whilst new boundary treatment would prevent any overlooking of this area from ground floor windows, the 1st floor windows of Number 64 would face directly onto the proposed garden area. There is a disagreement between the parties in respect of whether the garden would meet the 11m depth. However, in any event, due to the significant overlooking from the host properties, the proposed garden would not provide an acceptable amount of privacy.
14. I therefore conclude that the proposed development would have an adverse impact upon the living conditions of the occupiers of adjoining properties and future occupiers of the proposed development. The proposal, in this regard, would be contrary to the requirements of Policies CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Adopted Core Strategy (2010) (the Core Strategy) and the SPD and paragraph 127 of The Framework. These, amongst other matters, seek to ensure that new developments are of a good quality without harming the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring properties, that they relate well to neighbouring properties and take account of the sensitive relationships between existing and proposed developments.

Conclusion

15. I conclude, for the reasons outlined above, that the appeal should be dismissed.

Adrian Hunter

INSPECTOR