
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 July 2020

by Diane Cragg DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 August 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/D/20/3251495

Beech Cottage, Knutsford Road, Knolls Green, Mobberley WA16 7BW

- 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 Mrs Gemma Birchall against the decision of Cheshire East Council.
 - The application Ref 20/0004M, dated 30 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 19 March 2020.
 - The development proposed is 'to create a single space drive to the front of the property with a metal bi-fold gate and associated landscaping. The application also seeks to introduce a household electric vehicle charging point for the property'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. I have taken the name of the appellant from the appeal form as this provides full details of the appellant's name.
3. Paragraph 146 b) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) outlines that engineering operations are not inappropriate in the Green Belt, where the development preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Policy PG3 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2010 - 2030 (Local Plan) is similarly worded.
4. The Council confirm, and the appellant does not disagree, that the engineering operations would not be detrimental to the openness and purposes of the Green Belt. I agree and consequently I conclude that the proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Main Issue

5. Having regard to the above, the main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the Mobberley Conservation Area.

Reasons

6. Mobberley Conservation Area (the CA) is a low-density dispersed settlement. Roads tend to be narrow and winding with soft edges formed by grass verges and hedges. The Mobberley Conservation Area Appraisal April 2006 identifies six character areas within the village. Beech Cottage is located within the Knolls Green character area within which the congregational chapel next to the appeal site is identified as a focal building, a building of townscape merit and as

forming a group with the adjacent residential properties. The appraisal indicates that the public realm is largely defined by hedges which emphasises its rural character.

7. The appeal site is the middle property in a row of three terraced properties facing Knutsford Road. The former congregational chapel, now converted to a dwelling, is located to one side with Beech View to the other. The cottage has front boundary treatment consisting of a low stone wall with hedging above. The wall acts as a retaining structure for the higher land level between the cottage and the footpath and complements the enclosure of adjacent properties.
8. The previous appeal¹ identified that off-street parking is not a feature of the comparatively shallow frontages of the terraced row. I agree with the conclusion reached in this decision that the creation of the parking space would introduce an incongruous open frontage in the shallow space at the front of Beech Cottage. This would harmfully disrupt the rhythm of the frontages through the loss of front boundary treatment along the footway edge.
9. Although bi-folding gates are proposed along the road frontage to maintain a continuous front boundary they would not provide the degree of enclosure afforded by the existing wall and hedge. The change in land levels and the dropped kerb would be apparent through the gates. Further, it is likely that the gates would be open for significant periods of time to accommodate entry and exit from the site thus, the introduction of gates would be of limited effect in ameliorating the harm previously identified.
10. Consequently, the development would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. However, the proposal is relatively modest in the context of the CA as a whole and, as a result, in the language of the Framework, it would cause less than substantial harm to its significance as a designated heritage asset. Notwithstanding this, the Framework advises that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.
11. The appellant identifies a number of public benefits associated with the development. The provision of a parking space to the front of the property would remove the highway and personal safety hazard created by the daily loading and unloading of the car on the highway to the front of Beech Cottage. It would also remove the necessity to park in the layby further away from the cottage and walk back to the property. Walking back to Beech Cottage can be dangerous particularly when it is dark given the limited streetlighting in the area. In addition, the option of parking in the Bird in the Hand pub car park, which was possible when the previous scheme was considered, has been lost due to its closure and therefore parking in the layby is the only available off-road car parking.
12. The introduction of a vehicle recharging point that would allow the appellant to invest in an electric vehicle is supported by the Framework. Nonetheless, in contrast to the previous scheme the Council's Highway Officer and the Parish Council raise concerns about the bi-fold gates reducing the width of the opening and affecting the manoeuvring of vehicles in and out of the site. Further, parking on the road would be necessary to open and close the gates. Although the proposal would allow unloading to take place off the highway and

¹ APP/R0660/D/18/3218804

parking remotely from the appeal property would no longer be necessary, it seems to me that the limitations of the parking space are such that there would only be moderate public benefits associated with the proposal.

13. However, the moderate weight afforded to the public benefits of parking within the site and the provision of a vehicle charging point do not outweigh the great weight that is attached to the importance of conserving heritage assets. Consequently, the harm to the significance of the CA would outweigh the scheme's benefits.
14. As a result of the harm to the character and appearance of the CA, the proposal would conflict with Local Plan Policies SD1, SD2, SE1 and SE7 and saved Policy BE2 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan 2004 and the associated guidance in the SPD. The policies when taken together, seek high quality design with a positive contribution to their surroundings, respecting and enhancing where possible designated heritage assets. The policy approach is broadly consistent with the Framework and the duty under section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which requires that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas, with which the scheme would also conflict.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Diane Cragg

INSPECTOR