



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 September 2020

by Robert Parker BSc (Hons) Dip TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1 October 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/W/20/3253915

Gateways, Harcourt Hill, Oxford OX2 9AS

- 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 Siriwat Pinsiranon against the decision of Vale of White Horse District Council.
 - The application Ref P20/V0560/FUL, dated 25 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 11 May 2020.
 - The development proposed is construction of a new two storey house with double garage, drive and hardstanding areas, new plot division fence. New access onto Stanton Road.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. During my visit, and by prior written arrangement, I entered the back garden of Southfield unaccompanied to view the site from that perspective.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The pattern of development on Harcourt Hill is well-defined, comprising large detached family houses set well back from the highway behind a strong building line. The rectilinear plots are generously proportioned, with deep rear gardens combining to provide a sense of spaciousness and tranquillity. Stanton Road is less regimented, with some variety in the width of property frontages and several dwellings set at an angle to the road. Despite this, the houses take up a small percentage of their curtilage and there is a significant amount of greenery between the buildings and the road which emphasises the low density nature of development. The enclosure created by trees and vegetation flanking the entrance off Harcourt Hill contributes to a pleasant semi-rural atmosphere.
5. The proposal is to sever part of the rear garden belonging to Gateways to construct a 5-bed house and double garage. The resultant plot would be of equivalent width to others on this side of Stanton Road, but it would also be significantly shallower. As a consequence, the new dwelling would be closer to

- the road than might otherwise be the case and this would give it greater physical presence in comparison to other properties which are set back further into their plots. The close proximity of the development to the boundary with Southfield would be particularly noticeable for the occupiers of that property, and this would reinforce the impression of a building which has been shoehorned onto the site.
6. It is argued that the planted verge on the Stanton Road frontage would provide screening for the development in public views. However, some of this vegetation would be lost to create visibility splays for the new vehicle access and it would not provide year round screening in any event. The proposed dwelling would be a prominent and visually intrusive feature, particularly when viewed through the driveway entrance, and it would urbanise this section of Stanton Road to the detriment of the prevailing semi-rural character. Replacement planting behind the splays cannot be guaranteed to mitigate the adverse impacts and moreover it would take some time to establish.
 7. My attention is drawn to other plot subdivisions which have taken place in the area. However, these are few in number and were permitted under a former policy framework. I have taken account of the more recent appeal decision for Greenacre¹. However, that case is materially different in that the dwellings are set well back into the site and reflective of the prevailing building to plot ratios. The proposed dwelling by contrast would be disproportionate in scale to the site, and it would disrupt the established grain of development on Harcourt Hill.
 8. The officer report, upon which the Council is relying, concludes that the appearance of the proposed dwelling would not be harmful. The locality contains a range of individually designed properties and therefore I am minded to agree that the architectural style is not in itself objectionable. However, the excessive width and linear form of the building would increase its visual impact.
 9. The application is premised on the assertion that Gateways has an overly large rear garden. However, the garden is of similar size to others on Harcourt Hill. Although the proposal would represent a more efficient use of land, it would also be at odds with the low density character which typifies the area. Paragraph 122 of the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that the objective of making efficient use of land should take into account the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens). In my opinion, the proposal does not balance these factors appropriately.
 10. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would cause material harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with Core Policy 37 of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (2016) and supporting guidance within the Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2015) insofar as they seek development of high quality design that responds positively to the site and its surroundings, including being appropriate in terms of grain and density.

Other Matters

11. I have given careful consideration to all other concerns raised by residents, including the impacts on living conditions, biodiversity and highway safety. However, based on the information before me these matters would not form grounds to dismiss the appeal.

¹ APP/V3120/A/12/2175458

12. Residents state that land belonging to Harcourt Estate would be required to access the site, and that the wrong certificate of ownership has been served. However, as I am dismissing the appeal I need not address this in my decision.

Conclusion

13. The proposal would deliver a new family home within the built area of Botley where there is a good level of services and facilities. However, the harm to the character and appearance of the area would outweigh the sustainable location and the very modest benefits to housing supply and the local economy.
14. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Robert Parker

INSPECTOR