



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 August 2020

by M Aqbal BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 01 October 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/V2825/W/20/3247195

Harlestone Road, Northampton NN5 7AB

- 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 Hillier against the decision of Northampton Borough Council.
 - The application Ref N/2019/1550, dated 8 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 3 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is extensions and alterations to create 6 No. apartments.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the quality of the proposed accommodation would be acceptable for future occupants, with particular regard to the sizes of the proposed flats and accessibility to refuse and recycling facilities.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is a two-storey corner property which incorporates a shop at ground floor with living accommodation above. As a consequence of the proposal the property would be extended and converted to provide a studio apartment and 5 x 1-bed apartments.
4. In assessing the quality of the proposed accommodation, the Council has referred to the government's Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard (NDSS).
5. Although the Council has not adopted a local policy on housing standards, it intends to do this as part of Policy 4 of the emerging Northampton Local Plan Part 2 (eLP). However, because the eLP is at an early stage I am only able to attach limited weight to this. Nevertheless, the NDSS provides a good indication of the minimum amount of internal space required within dwellings to avoid harmful living conditions for occupants. In addition, the Council has referred me to the National Design Guide (NDG), published in October 2019, which in conjunction with the Planning Practice Guidance provides national design guidance. In particular, Paragraph 126 of the NDG recognises that room sizes contribute to well-designed homes.
6. Cumulatively, taking the above factors into account, I have given the NDSS significant weight as guidance in my determination of this appeal.

7. According to the NDSS, a one bedroom-one person flat with shower room requires 37 sqm of gross internal area (GIA). In this case with the exception of apartments 3 and 6, the other proposed units (1,2,4 and 5) would fall significantly short of the minimum GIA requirements of the NDSS. In practice, domestic furniture would further reduce the amount of space available for free circulation, movement and socialising, particularly given the range of facilities each apartment incorporates. Consequently, apartments 1,2,4 and 5 would offer cramped living accommodation, which fails to reflect good design.
8. Recycling and refuse storage for the proposed apartments would be provided outdoors in the yard area to the rear of the appeal property. To access this area future occupiers of the appeal property would have to go outside the building. Nonetheless, the submitted scheme incorporates some internal storage space for refuse and recycling materials which is likely to be sufficient for single-person accommodation. As such, trips to the outdoor recycling and refuse storage area are likely to be limited and therefore unlikely to compromise the quality of accommodation in respect of this particular matter.
9. Nevertheless, due to the limited living space afforded to most of the new apartments, overall, the proposed development would provide an unacceptable quality of accommodation for future occupants. This would be contrary to Policies H1 and S10 of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, which amongst other things seek to ensure that new developments are of the highest standard of design and take into consideration the amenities of occupiers.

Other matters

10. The appellant has drawn my attention to an extant planning permission¹ for 5 apartments at the appeal property, arguing that if applied retrospectively, only one of these units would meet the NDSS requirements. However, the extant scheme was approved prior to the eLP and the Council applying the NDSS, along with the publication of the NDG. Furthermore, approved apartment 5 only falls marginally short of the NDSS. Therefore, the overall number of units which significantly fall short of the NDSS is greater in the proposed scheme. The extant scheme also offers a mix of one and two bed housing units which is supported by the development plan.
11. There is also no substantive reasons to support the appellant's assertions that the provision of one-bed flats at the appeal property instead of the approved two-bed units, which could be occupied by small families, would be more appropriate to the proposed communal area and are likely to generate less demand for on-street parking. Therefore, such factors and the existence of the extant scheme do not outweigh the overall shortcomings associated with the quality of the proposed scheme and conflict with the development plan, which I have already identified.

Conclusion

12. For the above reasons, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

M Aqbal
INSPECTOR

¹ Ref: N2017/0997