
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 November 2020

by James Taylor BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 November 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C1760/W/20/3252794

Land to rear of 52 Alma Road, Romsey SO51 8ED

- 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 Philip Attlee against the decision of Test Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 19/02873/FULLS, dated 26 November 2019, was refused by notice dated 29 January 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as the 'erection of 1x 1-bed dwelling'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on:
 - i) the character and appearance of the area; and
 - ii) the living conditions of the occupiers of 50 Alma Road with particular regard to outlook.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal site is occupied by 52 Alma Road, a 2-storey end of terrace dwelling. The proposed development would be sited near the rearmost part of the back garden of no 52 which forms the return frontage along Albany Road. Adjacent to the development area is a further row of terraced 2-storey housing with attractive design details including bay windows, banding and traditional local materials. The form and scale of the buildings provides a clear rhythm within the street scene as well as a tight urban grain. This is relieved only by the modest set-back of the housing from the back edge of the pavement and the relative openness provided by the rear gardens of the Alma Road housing.
4. Whilst the appeal site is not subject to any special designations, Policy E1 of the Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan DPD, Adopted Local Plan 2011-2029, January 2016 (LP) seeks to ensure a high quality of design and local distinctiveness through development that integrates, respects and compliments the character of the area in terms of matters including layout, appearance, scale and building style. Furthermore, I afford some weight to the Design Guidelines within the Look at Romsey, Romsey Town Design Statement for

Romsey Town and Romsey Extra, Area 9 Romsey Town Centre Outer Core (RTDS) as it provides a framework for creating distinctive places in accordance with paragraph 126 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The guidance seeks, amongst other aims, to maintain the integrity of terraces and ensure that new buildings are urban in form.

5. The proposal would be at odds with the established built form due to its proportions, including the significantly lower eaves and ridge heights. Furthermore, the suburban form generated by features such as the first-floor overhang and undercroft style parking would not reflect the local distinctiveness of the terraced housing in this area. Nor would it create the appearance of a traditional ancillary workshop or coach house as asserted by the appellant. Whilst the use of red brick and slate with buff brick details would match the local vernacular, this does not mitigate the incongruous design.
6. Additionally, the proposal would be prominently sited, closer to the back edge of the pavement than the majority of the existing built form, especially at first floor level. This, along with the proposals detached form over 2-storeys, would result in the development appearing visually intrusive. It would significantly erode the rhythm of the terraced built form and the intervening space. The spaces in front and between the built form positively contribute to the character and appearance of the area.
7. The appellant has drawn attention to other examples of development within the vicinity that have been approved by the Council. However, none are within the same street scene and based on the limited evidence before me differ in a number of ways such as not to set any precedent for the proposal. As such, I afford these examples limited weight.
8. Therefore, in conclusion on this main issue the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. As such, the proposal would be contrary to Policies COM2 and E1 of the LP and the Design Guidelines within the RTDS. Policy COM2 seeks to establish the principle of development provided that it is appropriate to the other policies of the plan. That is not the case here.

Living conditions

9. To the south, 50 Alma Road, like the appeal site, has a relatively long rear garden. Whilst the open aspect to the south of the garden would remain, the proposal would introduce a high, solid mass up to the shared boundary at ground floor level which is then only slightly set in at first floor. Due to the narrowness of no 50's garden and the height of the built form the proposal would have a dominant and overbearing effect upon outlook. The proposed building would have a significant length that would enclose a notable proportion of no 50's garden from the north. In combination with the existing effects from the gable end of 11 Albany Road and the rear elevations of the Alma Road terrace, the proposal would result in a significant sense of enclosure within the narrow garden of no 50.
10. Given the separation distance, the slightly oblique angle of the gardens to the rear elevations of the terrace, and the height of the building, the proposal would not result in any significant harm to outlook from the habitable rooms of no 50. Furthermore, the lack of windows to the rear elevation would avoid any loss of privacy. However, these considerations do not mitigate the effect to the external garden space.

11. Therefore, in conclusion on this main issue, whilst the proposal is not the antithesis of good neighbouring development, it would harm the living conditions of the occupiers of 50 Alma Road with particular regard to outlook. As such, in this regard, the proposal would be contrary to Policies COM2 and LHW4 of the LP. Policy LHW4 seeks to protect the living conditions of neighbouring property having regard to the benefit to the public's wellbeing from being able to enjoy their private open space without experiencing overbearing effects. This is consistent with paragraph 127 f) of the Framework.

Other matters

12. The appeal site lies within the catchment of a group of European designated sites described by the Council as the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area. It remains an area of dispute between the main parties as to whether the proposal would alone or in combination lead to likely significant effects on the European designated sites. However, because I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons, in these circumstances, it is not necessary for me to reach a conclusion on this matter.
13. Furthermore, the site lies within 13.6 km of the New Forest Special Protection Area. The Council's and Natural England's assessments have concluded that the likely significant effects on the European designated sites can be appropriately mitigated through a planning obligation. However, again, because I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons, in these circumstances, it is not necessary for me to reach a conclusion on this matter. Even if I were to reach a similar conclusion, I find that the proposal would provide mitigation and that this weighs neutrally in any planning balance.
14. Whilst paragraph 59 of the Framework refers to the objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, and small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting housing requirements, the provision of one additional unit would make little meaningful difference. When judged against some of the core planning principles the proposal would perform well in that it would be in an urban area with good access to services and facilities and make a more effective use of land. However, as set out at paragraph 124 of the Framework, good design is also a key aspect of sustainable development.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

James Taylor

INSPECTOR