The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 October 2020

by N Holdsworth MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 03 December 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/K3605/W/20/3253874
22 Broad Highway, Cobham, KT11 2RP

- 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 P Steward against the decision of Elmbridge Borough Council.
- The application Ref 2019/3446, dated 9 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 12 May 2020.
- The development proposed was originally described as erection of a two storey house with rooms in the roof space and detached garage following demolition of the existing house.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The site is located on an estate of detached properties set in verdant gardens. The plots are large and irregular, and the buildings differ significantly in appearance. They are generally set back from the road, but there is no uniform building line and the orientation of the buildings also varies significantly. The spaciousness of the area is its defining visual characteristic.

4. The rendered, neo Georgian inspired style of the proposed building would not appear out of place given the range of architectural styles found around the site. It would be orientated to face the north, but this would be acceptable given the prevailing irregular character of the estate. Whilst it would be set close to the boundary with No.24, this largely follows the precedent set by the existing structure on the site. Considered in isolation, the development would not appear excessively bulky in relation to other properties on the estate.

5. The issue with this proposal is the width of the building, in relation to the plot. The single storey side element elongates the front of the main building significantly. It would extend very close to the boundary hedge, meaning that it would appear unusually close to the road, in comparison to most other buildings on the estate. Consequently, the development would appear cramped, when viewed from the street. The retained hedge and trees would not provide adequate screening, in this respect. The proposed development would therefore detract from the spacious character of this estate.

6. Consequently, there would be unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area, arising from this proposal. It conflicts with policies CS10 and CS17 of the Elmbridge Core Strategy 2011 and policy DM2 of the Elmbridge Development Management Plan 2015 which seek, amongst other things, to ensure that new development is well designed and integrates with local character. These aims would not be achieved here.

Other Considerations

7. Reference is made by both parties to other policies in the Development Plan, along with Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance. However, my conclusion above refers to the most relevant planning policies, given the specific harm identified.

8. I can understand that the appellant finds it frustrating that larger properties have been approved and built on the same size plot. I have taken account of the various examples cited. However, given the individual character of this area every plot and relationship to the road is unique, and each design approach must be considered on its merits. In this case, for the reasons explained above, the harm arises not through the overall size of the building or the principle of the design approach taken, but its width in combination with the proximity to the road.

9. I also appreciate that the proposal is driven by the desire to create a new family home. However, the works replace a large existing house, so the proposal is not adding to the housing stock in numerical terms. The cited policies are not out of date for the purpose of this decision. They are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework which seeks to achieve well-designed places, also reflected in the recent National Design Guide. There would be some economic benefits, including through economic activity associated with the construction process. The proposal would also incorporate a number of sustainable design features. However, these considerations do not, even cumulatively, outweigh the harm identified, which could not be overcome by the use of planning conditions.

10. There are objections to the development from neighbouring residents, raising other issues to those set out in the Council's reason for refusal and discussed in my reasoning above. However, the appeal is failing on the main issue identified by the Council, so there is no need to address these.

Conclusion

11. The proposal conflicts with the development plan, when it is considered as a whole, and there are no other considerations that outweigh this finding. The appeal should be dismissed.

Neil Holdsworth

INSPECTOR