
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 January 2021

by David Reed BSc DipTP DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 12 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Q0505/W/20/3259566

Chartwell House, 620-622 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8LP

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Paddock Street Holdings Ltd against Cambridge City Council.
 - The application Ref 20/01862/FUL, is dated 25 March 2020.
 - The development proposed is a rear 2.5 storey extension to contain one 2 bedroom flat and three studio flats with bin and cycle storage at ground floor and retention of office at Chartwell House.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The application follows an earlier proposal for one 2 bedroom flat and four studio flats which was refused and dismissed on appeal¹ for two reasons, the design of the scheme in relation to the character and appearance of the area and inadequate car parking. The Council are satisfied that the revised proposal overcomes the design concern so the main issue in this case is whether the proposal would provide adequate car parking for future occupiers of the flats and the existing business premises, and if not, whether this would have any adverse effects in Malden Close.

Reasons

3. The proposal is for an extension behind Chartwell House over part of the rear parking area to provide four units of residential accommodation. Chartwell House, which fronts onto Newmarket Road, provides about 593.7 sq m of office space (internal) over three floors whilst the western part of the building comprises a hairdressing salon (L&G) and two flats. The offices, hairdressing salon and flats would remain as now, the four new units being additional.
4. At present, the external car parking area accessed off Malden Close, the adjacent cul-de-sac, contains 19 marked out spaces with the offices also having use of three spaces in the undercroft of the building accessed by a roller shutter door. 5 of the external spaces are currently marked for use by L&G with one marked for disabled use (albeit undersized) and the remainder allocated to the offices.

¹ APP/Q0505/W/20/3250449

5. The proposed extension over about a third of the car parking area would reduce the number of external parking spaces to 8, an overall reduction of 11, of which three would be allocated for use by the four flats. Three fall outside the application site and would presumably be for the use of L&G, whilst two, a fully sized disabled space and a visitor space, would be available to the offices plus the three undercroft spaces. A total of 20 cycle parking places would be provided to encourage cycling to the offices.
6. Parking provision for the residential accommodation would be an improvement compared to the last scheme with three spaces for the use of four flats where previously they would have served five. Policy 82 of the Cambridge Local Plan 2018 (the CLP) seeks to reduce levels of private car parking to encourage modal shift and to this end Appendix L sets maximum standards which in this case would be no more than 6 spaces, 1.5 per dwelling, plus one visitor space.
7. The appeal site lies about 2.5 km away from the city centre but on a primary radial route served by footways, on road cycleways and regular public transport from a nearby bus stop. The site is also within easy walking distance of a range of services and facilities, and car ownership in the area is lower than the city as a whole. Given the nature of the scheme, with three small studio units and just one two bed flat, its location and likely level of car ownership, the ratio of 0.75 spaces per unit is not unreasonable as outside working hours the office visitor and disabled spaces may also be available. Two flats were recently permitted nearby at Nos 11-15 Malden Close with only limited parking².
8. However, the retained offices in Chartwell House would have greatly reduced car parking provision, from a total current provision of 17 allocated spaces to just 5, three of which would be in the undercroft which the previous Inspector considered awkward to use with limited manoeuvrability due to the siting of the building columns. Even the two external spaces would be disabled and visitor spaces and thus not for general use. In addition, the hairdressing salon L&G with five allocated spaces at present would appear to have just three.
9. The limited provision of car parking spaces for about 593.7 sq m of offices is not assessed against the admittedly maximum standards in CLP Appendix L, instead reliance is placed on a travel plan to reduce car use. However, this is only put forward as a concept with no supporting evidence and no details. No evidence of current car park usage is submitted, no survey of where existing staff live or how they get to work and no realistic assessment of the scope to practically increase sustainable modes of travel to the offices.
10. The offices are in an outer city/suburban rather than city centre location, and whilst adjacent to cycleway and bus routes these options may not be suitable for some staff. Daytime park and ride services do not stop at the adjacent bus stop and the nearest Newmarket Road terminus is only really convenient for some commuters. Importantly, there are no parking restrictions in Malden Close so even with a travel plan office staff are likely to continue to drive to work as now and try to park rather than use less convenient alternatives. The appellant suggests that appropriate places for off-site parking will be identified, but this is not done, and that the travel plan will be actively managed, but the practicalities of enforcement are not explained. In the circumstances of this case a travel plan is unlikely to be sufficiently effective to reduce parking demand and overspill parking on street is likely.

² Ref 16/1898/FUL

11. However, there are few suitable on street parking opportunities in Malden Close due to the layout of private parking spaces and access drives positioned around the turning head. Newmarket Road offers little or no scope for parking and in the absence of alternatives it is likely overspill parking from the offices would potentially occur in unsuitable or unsafe places in Malden Close. On the other hand, if the limited on-street spaces are taken by office workers, any overspill parking from nearby dwellings would occur in unsuitable or unsafe places. The result would be parking on the footway and/or the obstruction of driveways and parking spaces which would be detrimental to the amenity of nearby residents and, notwithstanding the views of the highway authority, a risk to highway safety. In these circumstances access for refuse and emergency vehicles would be adversely affected. Illustrating this, street views from 2014 and 2015 appear to show examples of footway parking, forcing pedestrians into the road, and although dating from several years ago, no later information is available. The recent scheme behind Nos 11-15 will not have improved matters.
12. Overall the scheme would result in a reduction of 11 parking spaces at the same time as the provision of four new units of accommodation compared with the previous proposal for five dwellings and the loss of 10 spaces. Whilst a disabled space would now be provided, the improvement is marginal and does little to address the previous Inspector's concerns.
13. For the above reasons the proposal would not provide adequate car parking for the existing business premises resulting in likely overspill parking on-street which would harm the amenities of nearby residents and increase highway safety risks. This would conflict with CLP Policies 58, 82 and Appendix L which require extensions to existing buildings to retain sufficient car parking and the provision of car parking to an appropriate standard unless lower car use can reasonably be expected given local circumstances, including the presence or otherwise of on-street parking controls.

Conclusion

14. The proposal would provide four additional units of accommodation which would make a useful contribution towards local housing needs in a sustainable location and offer social and economic benefits for the city. However, these material considerations do not outweigh the likely effects of a shortage of car parking in this case and the associated conflict with the development plan. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

David Reed

INSPECTOR