



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 January 2021

by Helen B Hockenhull BA (Hons) B.PI MRTPI

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

Decision date: 18 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/P4225/W/20/3258277

Land at rear of Hillside Drive, Middleton M24 2LS

- 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 Glynn Meredith against the decision of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00508/FUL, dated 7 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 20 August 2020.
 - The development proposed is the erection of one bungalow including the erection of a new retaining wall and the provision of associated landscaping works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The appeal site lies outside but on the edge of a conservation area and in the setting of a listed building. I have therefore had regard to sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this case are:
 - the effect on the setting of the Grade II* listed Former Queen Elizabeth Old Grammar School and Adjoining Schoolmaster's House (Ref:1356228) (Old Grammar School) and whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area (CA); and
 - the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the surrounding residential area.

Reasons

Significance and setting of heritage assets.

4. The appeal site forms an area of land occupied by garages located to the rear of residential properties on Hillside Drive, accessed by a driveway located between Nos 19 and 21. West of the site lies an area of allotments beyond which is the listed Old Grammar School which are both within the CA. It is

proposed to demolish five of the existing garages at the south west end of the site and erect a detached dormer bungalow.

5. The CA covers a large part of the northern town centre and encompasses a number of prominent public buildings, Jubilee Park, the commercial centre and surrounding residential areas. Its character derives from a unique and varied cluster of buildings including the Parish Church with Norman origins, the sixteenth century Old Grammar School and the nineteenth century mill buildings associated with the cotton industry. The renowned architect Edgar Wood was born and lived in Middleton and the CA includes a significant grouping of Arts and Craft buildings which he designed.
6. Given the above, I consider that the significance of the CA, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with its diverse grouping of listed buildings that are indicative of the town's growth and pre industrial past.
7. The Old Grammar School was built in 1586 with the Schoolmaster's House being added between 1835 and 1839. It is constructed from squared rubble with graduated stone slate roof and leaded casement windows with stone mullions. The building has a near symmetrical elevation with a central Tudor arched door, projecting plinth and stone quoins. The attached Schoolmaster's House adjoins the rear stair wing and is constructed in brick with slate roof.
8. The Old Grammar School is accessed from Boarshaw Road but is set down at a lower level. The brook which runs along its southern boundary together with the allotments, the appeal site and residential area beyond, all contribute to its setting, because of the open context they provide, allowing the significance of the building to be appreciated.

Effect of the proposal on the significance and setting of the listed building and the character and appearance of the conservation area.

9. The appeal site occupies an elevated position, around 5 metres above the natural ground level of the allotments. It is clearly visible both from the allotments and from Boarshaw Road looking through breaks in the existing tree cover on the allotment boundary.
10. The submitted plans indicate a bungalow with a ridge height of approximately 6 metres. With its prominent location overlooking the allotments and the Old Grammar School, the proposed bungalow would appear as an unduly dominant structure.
11. The appellant has argued that the trees would screen the development in views from the listed building and therefore its setting would be preserved. I acknowledge that my site visit was in the winter and that in the summer months the trees would filter and screen views to a greater extent. However, the appeal proposal would still be seen in the gaps between the trees and would be a permanent structure unlike the intervening vegetation that can die or be removed at any time. Consequently, I am not satisfied that an adverse impact on the setting of the heritage asset and the character and appearance of the CA would be avoided.
12. It is proposed to construct the dwelling in light yellow brickwork with stone quoins reflecting the materials of the listed building. However, the development would be seen against the backdrop of the surrounding red brick two storey

dwellings on Hillside Drive. This contrast in materials would serve to increase the prominence of the building and its incongruity.

13. The appeal scheme includes the provision of stepped gabion baskets to the western and northern site boundaries to stabilise the site. Whilst the gabions would be planted to soften their visual impact, their stepped nature would accentuate their appearance as a man-made non-natural feature. This would add to the site's highly discordant appearance.
14. I acknowledge that the site is currently hardstanding, scrubland and garages which are visible from the surrounding residential area as well as the CA. The proposal would tidy up the site, thus improving its visual appearance. Whilst this would have a positive effect on the character and appearance of the CA and the setting of the listed building, it would not outweigh the harm I have identified.
15. In summary, I find that the proposal would introduce an incongruous, overly prominent development which would have a detrimental effect on the setting of the listed building, and fail to preserve the character and appearance of the CA.

Heritage balance and conclusion on first main issue.

16. Paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (the Framework) advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation.
17. Paragraph 194 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets or from development within their setting and that this should have a clear and convincing justification. Given the spatial relationship of the appeal site and the Old Grammar School and having regard to the CA as a whole, I find the harm to be less than substantial but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight.
18. Under such circumstances, paragraph 196 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
19. The scheme would provide a new dwelling on previously developed land contributing to the supply and widening the choice of housing in the area. The construction of the dwelling would provide short term benefits to the local economy and future occupants would no doubt support local shops and services. However, as the proposal is for a single dwelling, the contribution to housing supply and the economic and social benefits would be limited.
20. I acknowledge that the dwelling would provide a new home for the appellant and his family. However, this would form a private benefit which would not benefit the wider public.
21. Given the above, I conclude that the public benefits do not outweigh the harm I have identified. Accordingly, the proposal would fail to preserve the setting of the listed Old Grammar School or the character and appearance of the Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area. The proposal would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 192 of the Framework and conflict with Policy P2 of the Rochdale Core Strategy 2016 and saved Policy BE/17 of the Rochdale Unitary Development Plan 2006 which seek to protect and enhance character, landscape and heritage.

Character and appearance of the surrounding residential area

22. The area in which the appeal site is located is residential in character. It comprises two storey semi-detached properties fronting Hillside Drive. The development of part of this backland site would result in a dwelling having no main road frontage located behind existing properties. This would be out of character with the existing pattern of development in the area.
23. The scheme is a partial redevelopment of the site, with 7 of the existing garages being retained. Whilst this would make an efficient use of land, it results in a constrained site. Consequently, it would not provide an attractive and well laid out proposal. It would represent poor design and be detrimental to the character and appearance of the area.
24. Accordingly the appeal scheme would be contrary to Policies DM1, P3 and C3 of the Rochdale Core Strategy, which seek to secure high quality design, taking the opportunity to enhance the quality of the area and providing a high standard of residential development and layout that produces attractive places.

Conclusion

25. I have found that the appeal scheme would fail to preserve the setting of the listed Old Grammar School, the character and appearance of the Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area and the character and appearance of the surrounding residential area. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Helen Hockenhull

INSPECTOR