

Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 5 January 2021

by Mr Martin Allen BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1 March 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/E5330/W/20/3259056

Aldington House, 107A Blackheath Park, Blackheath SE3 0EY

- 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 Purelake New Homes Ltd against the decision of Royal Borough of Greenwich.
 - The application Ref 19/1260/F, dated 4 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 20 May 2020.
 - The development proposed is the construction of lower ground floor extension, construction of a first floor extension and creation of four lightwells to facilitate the conversion of existing care home (Class C2) to nine self-contained flats (3x3-bed, 6x2-bed) with associated landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Applications for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Purelake New Homes Ltd against the Royal Borough of Greenwich. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. I have taken the description of development above from the appeal form, where it is indicated that the description has changed from that stated on the planning application form.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed parking arrangements on highway safety.

Reasons

5. The appeal site comprises a two-storey flat roofed building, formerly occupied as a care home. To the front of the site is Blackheath Park, whilst to both sides are Sweyn Place. There are mature gardens and grounds to the front of the building, while to the rear is limited planting, an area of hardstanding and parking areas.
6. The appeal scheme seeks the conversion of the building to nine residential units. The Council's concern stems from the parking provision for the proposed development. No parking is provided for within the appeal site; it is proposed

- to rely on nine parking spaces to the rear of the existing building, together with on-street parking within the nearby Sweyn Place.
7. There is disagreement between the parties in respect of the level of parking provision that should be sought for the proposal. The standards of parking as required by the London Plan (2016) would equate to a maximum parking requirement of less than 10 spaces, based on up to 1.5 space per 3-bed unit and less than 1 per 1-bed unit (given the figures are maximums, I consider it appropriate to round down the part figure). There is reference to areas in outer London with a low PTAL needing to consider higher levels of provision. Map 2.2 of the London Plan however defines the Royal Borough of Greenwich as being within inner London and as such considering higher parking provision would not be appropriate.
 8. Furthermore, I am conscious that the Intend to Publish version of the London Plan (the ItP London Plan) establishes differing maximum parking requirements. In areas within Inner London, with a PTAL of 0-1, a maximum of 0.75 spaces per dwelling are stated, equating to a maximum of 6 (again, rounded down as I have done above). Table A2.2 of the ItP London Plan identifies Greenwich as an Inner London Borough. Whilst I am aware that the ItP London Plan is not yet adopted, the maximum parking provision that I identify above is not subject to change and consequently I accord substantial weight to this. In this case, I therefore find that a maximum of 6 parking spaces would be required.
 9. The site is located within an area which has a PTAL of 0, indicating that there is a very poor level of accessibility to public transport. I note that both access to a railway station, as well as bus stops, are located in excess of 1 kilometre (km) from the appeal site. I note the appellants' comments that some occupiers will be willing to walk to access these transport options, yet this can not be guaranteed for all occupiers. Furthermore, walking such a distance to and from public transport would not be an attractive option when undertaking day-to-day activities, such as grocery shopping. I have had regard to appeal decisions¹ cited by the appellant which found that there was a good level of access to bus services. However, that scheme was located a shorter distance from bus stops than is the case in the scheme before me and thus this decision does little to dissuade me from my findings above.
 10. I am conscious that it has been highlighted that within the vicinity of the appeal site there is an average car ownership level of 0.65 car per flat. Nevertheless, this information has considered car ownership across other parts of the local area, where there is a higher PTAL and thus better access to public transport. I also note that it is contended that the occupiers of 47% of units in the area, live car-free. However, given the circumstances of the appeal site and its location, I find it likely that the poor access to public transport would result in a high proportion of the occupiers of the scheme relying on the private car in order to access services. This is also likely to be the case for existing occupiers in the area.
 11. In light of the above, even recognising that some individuals may be willing to walk longer distances to access public transport, I find it likely that most, if not all, of the occupiers of the development would be reliant on, and own, a car. In

¹ APP/Y3615/W/17/3173617 and APP/R3650/W/17/3173615

these circumstances, I find that it would be appropriate to seek a car parking provision of the maximum required i.e. 6 car parking spaces.

12. The scheme makes no provision for car parking within the appeal site, instead relying on 9 spaces provided to the north of the building. Whilst the occupiers of the existing building have access to these spaces, they are not for their exclusive use, but are shared with other residents within the area. The Council state that officers observed there to be three spaces vacant, whilst the appellants' parking survey identified that only one space was vacant; this was the case also at the time of my site visit (09:30). This indicates that these spaces are well used with little capacity to accommodate additional vehicles. In the absence of being able to rely on the use of these parking spaces, occupants would be required to seek parking elsewhere. Furthermore, even if occupants were able to occupy some of the 9 spaces when available, given the level of usage observed, this would then likely result in vehicles of existing residents being displaced
13. To the front of the building, Blackheath Park is controlled via parking permit and as such would not provide an opportunity for residents to park and I am conscious that information has been submitted to show that parking permits will not be issued to any occupants of the proposed units. In close proximity to the building is Sweyn Place within which are a number of dedicated parking courts, which are available to occupants of surrounding units but would not be accessible by occupants of the proposed scheme. There is also some on-street parking within Sweyn Place, but I am conscious that the roads within the area are private and do not form part of the public highway and it has not been demonstrated that occupants would be able to utilise any nearby on-street parking provision.
14. In such circumstances, residents would then have to look further afield in order to find unrestricted parking, in particular long term (such as overnight) parking, and I note that the appellant has highlighted where on-street parking is available in the wider area. The closest of these locations is less than 500 metres (m) from the site, with further locations within 500m-1km. While this is not an insubstantial distance from the site, I find that given the constraints present within the vicinity of the appeal site that residents would have little choice but to park at these distant locations when seeking longer term parking, such as overnight.
15. However, while I appreciate that there is some discouragement provided by various restrictions in the immediate vicinity of the appeal site and that this is likely to deter longer term on-street parking, I find that residents, both of the proposed units or those displaced from the existing parking spaces, would be very likely to seek to park as close as possible to their residence and consequently risk parking at unauthorised locations for shorter periods, when unloading shopping or undertaking other day-to-day activities for example. While noting the lack of objection from the Council's Highway Officer, in my view this is likely to give rise to parking at unsafe and hazardous positions, such as the road junctions in the area, notwithstanding the presence of double yellow lines. My view in this regard is reinforced by comments made that there is already a high demand for parking within the area and a high level of occupancy of parking spaces. This unsafe parking, near to junctions, would have the potential to block visibility of oncoming traffic along the roads, as well as preventing vehicles from fully turning off roads. I find that this would be

likely to prejudice the safety of traffic and that this would be the case even when it does not take place for extended periods.

16. Accordingly, the lack of satisfactory parking arrangements would have a harmful effect on highway safety. Thus, the proposal conflicts with policies IM4 and IM(c) of the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy with Detailed Policies (2014), as well as policies 6.3 and 6.13 of the London Plan (2016). Together, and amongst other things, these policies seek to reduce the use of the private car, to ensure adequate parking provision and to prevent an adverse effect on the transport network. The scheme would also conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework, insofar as the scheme would result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

Other Matters

17. I am conscious that the building was previously utilised as a care home, which would have attracted its own parking demand. However, the site has been vacant for some time and I am particularly mindful that the appellant sets out that the care home use was not viable and that the building is not suitable for the use. As such, there is little or no likelihood of a care home use resuming. As a consequence, the parking demand formerly generated by the previous use has little bearing on my decision.
18. The appeal scheme would result in bringing the existing building back into a beneficial use and I note that the Council do not resist the proposal on any grounds other than highway safety. While this is noted, this is not sufficient to outweigh the harm I identify above.

Conclusion

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

Martin Allen

INSPECTOR