



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 March 2021

by Robert Parker BSc (Hons) Dip TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 March 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/L3625/W/20/3259702

24 Epsom Lane South, Tadworth KT20 5SX

- 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 Robert Coughlan of Epsom Lane Ltd against the decision of Reigate & Banstead Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20/00948/F, dated 10 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 8 July 2020.
 - The development proposed is demolition of the existing property and development of 4 new 4 bed semi-detached properties (2 buildings with associated parking).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - a) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area; and
 - b) the effect on the living conditions of the occupiers of 22 Epsom Lane South, with particular reference to outlook.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The distinctive character of Epsom Lane South, between its junctions with Cross Road and Tadworth Street, is derived from detached dwellings set within spacious, verdant plots. The properties are individually designed and the resulting blend of architectural styles creates a sense of informality which contributes positively to the appearance of the area. Mature vegetation on plot frontages dominates the street scene, but most of the dwellings are visible from the lane through driveway entrances.
4. No 24 occupies one of the wider plots in the lane. Somewhat uniquely, it has two vehicular accesses, with a gravelled driveway linking them in an arc. The house is positioned centrally on the plot, with generous gaps to the side boundaries. The proposal is to replace the house with two pairs of semi-detached, two and a half storey dwellings served by a new vehicular access at the midpoint of the site frontage. The existing entrances would be gapped up with new hedging.

5. The proposed development would be visible through the new access. The appellant suggests that the scheme would resemble a pair of detached properties. However, the strong symmetry on the principal elevations means that the buildings would read as semi-detached. This would be out of keeping in a neighbourhood characterised by detached dwellings where the diversity arising from bespoke architecture is a defining quality. The homogeneity resulting from the replication of a single building design would fail to respond to the eclectic architecture along the lane.
6. The building symmetry would draw attention to the narrow plot widths. The shallow rear gardens would not be quite so obvious to the casual observer, but the size and proportions of the plots would be at odds with the lower density grain of development prevailing in the locality. The dwellings would be pushed to the outer edges of the site with a wide gap in between for parking. Existing properties in Epsom Lane South are generally positioned centrally within their plots in a similar manner to No 24; set in this context, the proposed layout would appear incongruous and visually cramped. Additionally, the shared access serving a communal parking and turning area would be discordant in a lane where every other property is provided with its own dedicated driveway.
7. The appellant has drawn my attention to the residential developments at 58 Cross Road and 14 Epsom Lane South. Each involved the replacement of one dwelling with two dwellings. However, those new properties are detached and the individual plot sizes are more reflective of those in the locality. The current appeal proposal is not directly comparable to either scheme.
8. I conclude that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area. There would be conflict with Policies DES1 and DES2 of the Reigate and Banstead Development Management Plan 2019 (DMP) insofar as they seek to ensure that development reinforces local distinctiveness and respects the character of the surrounding area, including in relation to matters such as layout, density, plot sizes/widths and building siting.

Living conditions

9. The boundary between the appeal site and 22 Epsom Lane South is marked by a mature hedge and numerous trees located towards the front of the site. The existing house at No 24 is set well back from this vegetation screen, providing the occupants of No 22 with a degree of seclusion in their garden. Construction of the proposed dwelling on Plot 4 would necessitate the removal of several trees which would have the effect of opening up part of the boundary.
10. The new dwelling would project beyond the rear wall of No 22 by roughly 3 m. The proximity of two-storey built form would be obtrusive and overbearing for these neighbours and this would adversely affect their living conditions. There would be conflict with the requirements in DMP Policies DES1 and DES2 that development should maintain separation to neighbouring properties and avoid adverse impacts on the amenity of occupants of existing nearby buildings.

Other Matters

11. Concerns have been raised in respect of the proximity of the development to 58A Cross Road. I was able to assess the proposal from the garden of this property during my site visit. Plot 1 of the development would lead to some limited reduction in outlook, privacy and sunlight for this neighbour, but the

impacts would be within acceptable limits and they would not be so significant as to make this a reason for dismissing the appeal.

12. I have taken account of all other matters raised in representations from local residents, including in relation to parking and highway safety. However, based on the evidence before me, no other material consideration is of such strength or significance as to alter my conclusions on the main issues.

Conclusion

13. The proposal would contribute to the supply of housing in the Borough, within the Urban Area and in a location which is accessible to shops, services and public transport. However, the modest benefits of providing three additional dwellings would be outweighed by the harm to both the character and appearance of the area and the living conditions of the occupiers of 22 Epsom Lane South.
14. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, including the Council's acceptance of the principle of redevelopment on the site and the priority within the National Planning Policy Framework to make effective use of land, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Robert Parker

INSPECTOR