
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 March 2021

by Robert Parker BSc (Hons) Dip TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 March 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/C3620/W/20/3260284
23 The Glade, Fetcham KT22 9TQ

- 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 Tommy Caswell against the decision of Mole Valley District Council.
 - The application Ref MO/2020/0809/PLA, dated 12 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 23 July 2020.
 - The development proposed is construction of two bungalows to the rear of 21 & 23 Access via 23 The Glade existing driveway.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

3. The appeal site is occupied by Nos 21 and 23 The Glade which both front the road. The proposal is to construct a pair of detached bungalows in the long rear gardens, served by a new shared driveway running between the existing properties and accessed off The Glade. The site layout bears a strong similarity to a proposal which was dismissed on appeal¹ relatively recently, although I note from the plans that those dwellings would have been one and a half storey.
4. The local area has a pleasant suburban character, with a wide range of house styles. The predominant form of development is one of detached properties set back from the highway frontage behind gardens and off-street parking, with mature trees making a positive contribution to the street scene. The Glade has a consistent building line and its plot sizes are fairly generous, the ample gardens and roadside verges giving rise to a strong sense of spaciousness. This character is referenced within the Built Up Areas Character Appraisal for Bookham and Fetcham Supplementary Planning Document (2010) which notes the medium to low densities within West Fetcham and the regular size/spacing of house plots, the latter providing a sense of coherence despite the variety of house design.

¹ APP/C3620/W/19/3237722

5. The previous appeal is an important material consideration. The Inspector in that case considered that the location of the proposed dwellings to the rear of the existing buildings would be a departure from the prevailing pattern of development within the local area. Furthermore, it was deemed that the plot sizes for the existing and proposed dwellings would be out of character with the area's existing spacious character. The present appeal proposes a near identical site layout and therefore I have no reason to reach a different conclusion.
6. The proposed bungalows would not be readily visible from the street. However, the same was also true of the previous scheme. The Inspector in that appeal determined that the significant harm to the character and appearance of the area made the scheme unacceptable, despite the lack of public vantage points. I am minded to take the same view in respect of the present appeal, on the basis that the sense of spaciousness is an intrinsic part of the area's character.
7. The appellant has provided a list of other developments in The Glade, arguing that these set a precedent for smaller plots and backland development. It is clear from these examples that plot subdivision has occurred locally, in some cases creating narrower plots, but most of the new dwellings retain a frontage onto the street. Insofar as there are instances of development in depth, these are isolated examples and do not reflect the established character of the area. The proposal before me would generate plots which are significantly smaller than the norm within the locality and a layout which fails to respond to the dominant grain of development. As such, it would fail to reinforce local distinctiveness.
8. Reference has been made to approved schemes in The Ridgeway. I do not know the full background to these, but in any event they are some distance from the appeal site and are not viewed in the same context. That backland development has been approved elsewhere in Fetcham does not carry any significant weight in favour of the appellant's case as each application must be determined on its merits.
9. I conclude that the proposal would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. There would be conflict with Policy CS14 of the Mole Valley Core Strategy (2009) and Policies ENV22, ENV23 and ENV24 of the Mole Valley Local Plan (2000) insofar as these seek to ensure that new development respects and enhances the character of the surrounding area, including with regard to street patterns and the space around buildings. These policies predate the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) but they are generally consistent with its requirements that development should: (i) be sympathetic to local character and (ii) maintain an area's prevailing character and setting.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

10. The Council concedes that it is unable to demonstrate a 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites. Under such circumstances paragraph 11(d)(ii) the Framework states that permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.
11. The proposal would deliver 2 additional dwellings which would make a small contribution to the overall supply of housing. It would also meet an identified need for 2 and 3-bed homes within the District. The build phase would provide a limited stimulus for the construction industry and spending by future occupiers would help to support the local economy.

12. However, the appeal scheme would cause considerable harm to the character and appearance of the area. This adverse impact would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the modest benefits. As such, the proposal would not constitute a sustainable form of development for which there is a presumption in favour under the Framework.
13. The proposal conflicts with the development plan read as a whole and there are no material considerations to indicate that the application should be determined otherwise than in accordance with the development plan. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, including the absence of harm in respect of matters such as neighbour living conditions and highway safety, I conclude that the appeal should fail.

Robert Parker

INSPECTOR