



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 August 2020

by S Thomas BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 April 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/W3330/W/20/3252718

Swimming Pool Building, The Croft, Anchor Street, Watchet TA23 0BY

- 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 Andrew Musgrave against the decision of Somerset West and Taunton Council.
 - The application Ref 3/37/20/001, dated 20 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 28 April 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as demolition of existing swimming pool enclosure and erection of dwelling and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are (i) whether the proposed development would preserve or enhance the Watchet Conservation Area (CA); and (ii) the effect of the proposed development on highway safety with particular regard to on street parking.

Reasons

Conservation Area

3. The appeal site contains a swimming pool enclosed with a polytunnel structure. It is located along a private drive, served via another private road off Anchor Street. It is situated to the front of an existing property (No 2) which is part of a group of properties (the Croft), arranged fronting the private drive in a fairly regular courtyard arrangement. The site lies to the south of Watchet CA, an attractive harbour town.
4. The Civil Parish of Watchet, West Somerset Conservation Area Review (2002) (CAR) indicates the distinctive character of the CA derives from its function as a Bristol Channel Port. The appeal site lies just outside the historic core which is bounded by Anchor Street. The character of the historic core is defined by the modest two storey structures which derive interest from the close built small-scale streets, subtle variations in building lines and limited range of materials. Given the above, I find the significance of the CA, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with the character and arrangement of the built form.

5. The proposed dwelling is of a design that would not be uncharacteristic of properties located off this private drive. However, the proposed dwelling would be awkwardly sited at an angle to the private drive, which would appear discordant compared to the regular courtyard arrangement of the surrounding properties. Furthermore, given the constrained nature of the plot and the very close proximity to the front elevation of No 2, the dwelling would appear hemmed in and cramped within the plot.
6. It would not integrate well amongst the surrounding built form and would appear incongruous and intrusive in public views from the Croft and Anchor Street. Accordingly, the proposed dwelling would be uncharacteristic of development within the CA and would detract from its character and appearance. Although I acknowledge the removal of the polytunnel would improve the appearance of the area, the proposed dwelling would have a more dominant and harmful impact.
7. I therefore conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the character or appearance of the CA. Whilst I find the harm to this designated heritage asset to be on the lower end of the less than substantial spectrum in this instance, it is nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) says that such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal and that great weight should be given to a designated heritage asset's conservation. Whilst the proposal would result in the provision of additional housing, which is a public benefit, it is only for one additional dwelling. Accordingly, the benefits associated with it would be very modest and would not outweigh the harm I have found to the character or appearance of the CA.
8. Consequently, the proposal would be in conflict with Policies NH13, NH1 and NH2 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032 (2016) (Local Plan). Amongst other matters these policies seek to ensure that development affecting a CA preserves its character, development should be of the highest standards of design responding positively to its context and should make a positive contribution to the local environment.

Highway Safety

9. I observed on my visit a number of the existing properties have parking provision together with a shared parking courtyard to serve the holiday cottages. This did not appear at capacity on my visit and had available space. Neither did I observe any overspill parking within the parking area proposed for the new dwelling. Furthermore, the site is located within walking distance to the town centre which would likely reduce demand for vehicles.
10. Whilst parking is restricted on surrounding roads, I observed spaces were available along Mill Street and Whitehall within the vicinity of the site. In any event, I am satisfied that visitor parking to the holiday cottages could be suitably accommodated within existing provision. Therefore, I do not consider that the loss of these spaces to serve the proposed dwelling on this private drive, would cause unacceptable harm to highway safety on the surrounding road network.
11. The proposal does not provide for any cycle storage. Nevertheless, there would appear suitable space within the proposed garden area to accommodate storage for bicycles. Accordingly, had I found in favour of the appeal; this could

be secured through an appropriate planning condition. I do not find the proposal unacceptable in this regard.

12. For the above reasons, the proposal would not result in unacceptable harm to highway safety with regard to parking. Accordingly, it would not conflict with saved Policy T/8 (cross referenced Appendix 4) of the West Somerset Local Plan (2006). Amongst other things this policy seeks provision of car parking and cycle provision in line with adopted standards. Given the above, I do not find conflict with the Somerset County Council Parking Strategy 2013 Section 5 'residential parking' nor Paragraphs 105 and 106 of the Framework.

Conclusion

13. Whilst I have found in favour of the appellant in terms of the effect of the proposal on highway safety, this does not overcome the identified harm in relation to the first main issue. Overall, the proposal would conflict with the development plan.
14. For the reasons above, the appeal does not succeed.

S Thomas

INSPECTOR