



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 May 2021

by Martin Chandler BSc MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 May 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/W/20/3263367

30 Beechfield Road, Welwyn Garden City AL7 3RF

- 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 Gavin Prime against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2019/2650/FULL, dated 20 January 2020, was refused by notice dated 20 March 2020.
 - The development proposed is the addition of a new vehicle access and driveways.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are whether the proposal would:
 - i) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Peartree Conservation Area; and
 - ii) provide a safe and suitable access.

Reasons

Peartree Conservation Area

3. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservations Areas) Act 1990 requires special regard to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.
4. Peartree Conservation Area (CA) represents a planned part of the broader Garden City. This is apparent through the presence of wide grass verges, mature landscaping, and houses which are set back from the road generating a consistency in building lines. Together, these attributes create a pleasing suburban environment and consequently, are fundamental to the significance of the CA.
5. The appeal site includes the space to the front of both 28 and 30 Beechfield Road. The road benefits from green verges, mature street trees, and front gardens between the verges and houses, with very few instances of cars parked to the front of dwellings. The planned nature of the road is even more apparent where the appeal site is located. At this point, the building line of the houses incorporates a splay with the properties then framing a central parking area either side of the carriageway. Moreover, generous planting areas and wider grass verges help to soften the parking space. The combination of the

landscaping and wide verges, and the carefully considered layout of the houses with limited parking to the front, is typical of the planned surroundings. The appeal site is prominently located within this architectural set piece and as a consequence, together with its immediate surroundings, it makes an important contribution to the character and appearance of the CA.

6. The proposal would seek to convert the areas to the front of the houses to hardstanding to facilitate the parking of cars. However, due to the setback nature of the appeal site, to do this a generous access would be required from the carriageway to the hardstanding. A footpath currently exists in the location proposed, however, this path is narrow and connects with other footpaths of a similar size and appearance. Accordingly, the footpath is an incidental part of the broader planned environment.
7. The proposed access would be substantially wider. As a consequence, it would erode some of the important grass verge and introduce a wide engineered access, as opposed to the narrow and unassuming footpath. Accordingly, the proposed access would become a prominent and imposing area of hardstanding which would be distinctly at odds with, and harmful to, the carefully planned environment. Moreover, as well as compromising the verdant surroundings, the proposal would introduce cars parked to the front of the property. This is not commonplace in the immediate surroundings with front gardens generally complementing the wide verges and planned landscaping. Consequently, the provision of cars to the front of the two dwellings would be demonstrably harmful to the pleasing and planned environment.
8. Opposite the site, a dropped kerb and access has been installed to provide car parking. However, the parking is situated to the rear of the houses and consequently, I am satisfied that this example is materially different to the proposed development. Accordingly, it does not alter my findings set out above. I also note that cars can park to the front of No 18, however, I find this to be visually intrusive to the CA and as a consequence, this example does not weigh in favour of the proposal.
9. The development would result in less than substantial harm to the CA. Consequently, Paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires this harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In this regard, the proposal would provide opportunities to charge electric vehicles. Environmentally, this weighs in favour of the proposal, however, due to the small scale of the proposal, the weight is limited. I also note the reference to concerns with parking capacity and the potential benefit of taking some cars off the highway. I do not doubt that the road is well utilised for the parking of cars, but no evidence has been provided to demonstrate that this is harmful to highway safety. Consequently, limited weight is also given to this matter. Advice previously provided by the Council's estates team is not material to my assessment of the appeal.
10. Paragraph 193 of the Framework requires that great weight should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset. Accordingly, when conducting the necessary balancing act and giving great weight to the effect on the CA, my judgement is that the benefits of the proposal do not outweigh the harm.
11. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would not preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA. It would therefore conflict with Saved Policies D1, D2, D8 and R17 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan (2005). Taken

together, these seek amongst other things, high quality design which respects the character and context of the area in which it is proposed, including landscaping.

Access

12. Due to the planned nature of the surroundings, and the distance between the appeal site and the highway, the proposed access to the driveways would cross two existing pedestrian walkways. Despite this, the siting of the appeal site is such that the footpath nearest to the proposed driveways is angled. In my judgement therefore, the route of the path would aid visibility because passing users would be more noticeable. Although the access would cross a further footpath, the distance from the driveway would aid visibility for all users.
13. I note the reservations from the Council regarding highway safety, however, no evidence has been presented to confirm that visibility would be substandard or that highway safety would be meaningfully compromised. On this basis therefore, I have nothing compelling before me to support this view.
14. Accordingly, based on the evidence before me, I conclude that the proposal would provide a safe and suitable access. It would therefore comply with Policies D1 and D5 of the LP, and Policy SADM2 of the Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission (2016). Taken together, these seek amongst other things, development which takes into account movement patterns and seeks to preserve the safety of highway users.

Conclusion

15. I have found that the proposal would provide a safe and suitable access. However, this does not alter or outweigh my findings in relation to the harm to the CA. Accordingly, the appeal should be dismissed, and planning permission refused.

Martin Chandler

INSPECTOR