



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 25 May 2021

by L Douglas BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/R5510/W/20/3263079

17 Woodside Road, Northwood HA6 3QE

- 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 Chris Harris of Apollo Architectural Services Ltd against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hillingdon.
 - The application Ref 29754/APP/2020/1397, dated 30 April 2020, was refused by notice dated 18 September 2020.
 - The development proposed is "demolition of existing double garage and erection of new two storey, four bedroomed detached house".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the Gatehill Farm Estate Area of Special Local Character (ASLC).

Reasons

3. The appeal site is occupied by a large two-storey detached house, off-set to the north-eastern side of a large tapered plot which is widest and highest at the rear. The main entrance is located on the south-western side elevation under a large porch with a pitched roof, facing towards an existing drive and detached single storey garage.
4. The surrounding area is characterised by large two-storey detached houses of various ages set within large plots. Most houses feature designs influenced by the arts and crafts style, typical of the ASLC. Although many of the houses in the surrounding area appear to take up the full width of their plots, there is a distinct feeling of spaciousness created by the large open and largely undeveloped frontages which correspond with wide front elevations, set back from the grass verged highway, and interspersed with mature trees and planted boundaries. These elements contribute positively to the ALSC. The appeal site differs from most neighbouring properties in that it retains a driveway up the side of its plot and the existing dwelling has its main entrance on its side elevation.
5. It is proposed to erect a detached two-storey house in place of the existing drive and detached garage, in front of the main entrance to the existing house. The new dwelling would be in general conformity with the building line of this side of the street, forward of No.15, which is set back further than most. The design of the proposed house would reflect the local arts and crafts vernacular

on its front elevation with a hipped main roof, gabled bay window with herringbone facing brickwork, and a prominent external chimney breast on its north-eastern elevation. In contrast, the other elevations would be fairly uninspiring; the rear would be dominated by a modern fenestration layout and the long plain side elevations would be designed to suit the site's constraints by seeking to avoid any overlooking windows.

6. Due to the confines of the site, the proposed dwelling would necessitate the demolition of the porch to the existing dwelling. Its plot would be narrower at the front and the proposed dwelling would step out in width towards the rear along the south-western boundary. On account of its orientation, it would present to the street scene as a long, narrow incursion, at variance with the wider plots and buildings that influence the character of this part of the ASLC.
7. Policy DMHB 6 of the Council's Local Plan: Part 2¹ relates to new housing development within the ASLC, intending to ensure conformity with the character of the area. Part (i) of the Policy requires new houses to be constructed on plots of a similar average width as surrounding properties. The appellant has made representations concerning the application of this aspect of the policy by taking a mean average calculation from the front and rear boundary widths and then comparing this to neighbouring properties.
8. I have been presented with different measurements for the width of the proposed plot. The appellant's architect has provided a detailed explanation of their survey measurements. Relying on these detailed measurements, the proposed plot would be 9.5m in width at the front boundary and 19.6m in width at the rear boundary. Using the appellant's method of calculating a mean plot width of 14.55m may produce an 'average plot width' that compares favourably to neighbouring plot widths, but it fails to acknowledge that the proposed plot and dwelling would appear uncharacteristically narrow in the street scene due to the tapered site. Policy DMHB 6 seeks to avoid this by requiring new dwellings to relate appropriately to their landscaped settings, in accordance with Policies DMHB 5 and DMHB 11 too.
9. It would be counterintuitive to compare the front boundary measurements of the proposed plot, which abuts the highway and plays a vital role in dictating the character and appearance of the proposal in the street scene, to the rear boundaries of neighbouring properties. The rear plot width of No.4 Woodside Road has been referred to, which is particularly narrow and forms a shared boundary between private gardens. This is not noticeable from the street, and I therefore find such comparisons unhelpful, especially having read the Inspector's reasoning in allowing that scheme² which specifically referred to its visible plot frontage of approximately 15m being similar to neighbouring properties.
10. Third parties have provided a list of plot widths within Woodside Road, but this has not been agreed as accurate by all parties, and neither of the main parties have identified what they consider to be the average width of surrounding properties, as referred to by Policy DMHB 6. There are variances in plot widths in the surrounding area, but based on what I saw during my site visit and all of the information provided, the proposed plot would be the narrowest in Woodside Road and it would not appear to be of a similar average width as

¹ The Hillingdon Local Plan: Part Two – Development Management Policies (2020)

² APP/R5510/W/17/3171932

- neighbouring properties in the street scene, to the detriment of the character and appearance of the area.
11. Part (iv) of Policy DMHB 6 explicitly states an absolute minimum of 1.5m shall be retained between new dwellings and their side boundaries. This would be respected on the south-western boundary, but the external chimney breast on the north-eastern boundary would protrude closer to the proposed side boundary with the existing dwelling. I noted during my site visit that many properties sit close to their side boundaries with intervening planting; however, the Policy is clear that a 1.5m gap is an absolute minimum and no details of planting along this boundary have been provided. The proposal fails to accord with this absolute minimum, and I have not been provided with any information to justify any deviation from this part of the recently adopted Policy. The appellant has suggested the chimney could be removed from the proposal, but this is an intrinsic part of proposed design to reflect the local style.
 12. Existing planting along the boundary shared with No.15 is shown to be retained in the appellant's Arboricultural Report³, with the exception of one unprotected mature Ash (T8), which has a limited life expectancy due to Ash die back. The planting most affected (T7 – T13) would be located within a 1.5m gap between the proposed dwelling and the side boundary shared with No.15, which has been identified as low quality by the appellant. The main parties agree this planting can be retained (with the exception of T8) throughout building works if appropriate conditions are used and I see no reason to disagree. Any such conditions could require appropriate replacement planting in the event that any of these trees are damaged or removed as a result of building works.
 13. All other mature trees are shown to be retained, with some to be pruned. The Arboricultural Report explains how the proposal would not adversely affect those trees during or after construction, which could be controlled through enforceable conditions. Therefore, although the proposal would result in the loss of a mature tree, having considered the specific circumstances of that tree and the opportunity to protect or enhance other trees, it is my view that the loss of T8 would not cause unacceptable harm to the character or appearance of the area.
 14. The proposal would therefore satisfactorily preserve existing mature trees and boundary planting, but would appear as a cramped and uncharacteristically narrow addition to this part of the ASLC on account of its orientation in a plot which would appear substantially smaller than neighbouring properties in the street scene. This would reduce the sense of spaciousness experienced in this part of the ASLC.
 15. As a result of the above harm, the proposal would fail to accord with Policy BE1 of the Council's Local Plan: Part 1⁴ and Policies DMHB 5 and DMHB 11 of the Council's Local Plan: Part 2. These policies require, amongst other things, new development to improve and maintain the quality of the built environment, enhance local distinctiveness and reflect the character of the area, while taking into account surrounding building plot sizes and widths. Although I have found the proposal to be in accordance with some parts of Policy DMHB 6, I have found it would fail to accord with other parts of the same Policy, as set out

³ Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement dated 19.11.2019

⁴ The Hillingdon Local Plan: Part One – Strategic Policies (2012)

above. The proposal's adherence to some parts of this Policy would not outweigh the harm I have identified which would fail to accord with those other parts, or the other Policies mentioned.

16. The Council's decision notice refers to Policy DMH 6 of the Council's Local Plan: Part 2. Having read this policy, it strikes me as being most relevant to schemes for backland development in gardens. Whilst the appeal scheme would take place in a garden (within a residential plot) it would not be backland development due to its siting. The sufficiency of other policies I have cited aside, I do not consider the policy to be directly relevant to the main issue of the case.
17. The decision notice also refers to Policy 7.4 of the London Plan, albeit the 2016 iteration which has since been superseded. I have not been provided copies of any relevant policies of the new London Plan and consequently cannot comment further thereon. I am confident however that the other policies I have cited are sufficient to refer to the main issues of the appeal.

Other Matters

18. I have seen both main parties make comparisons between the proposal and a separate permitted scheme at the appeal site which comprises the extension of the existing dwelling. No copies of that scheme have been submitted as part of the appeal and I have therefore been unable to make any comparison or apply any weight to claims that this is a fallback position in favour of the proposal.
19. Reference has been made to detached dwellings permitted at other sites within the ASLC. I have looked at these, but different circumstances apply to each case and these examples do not alter the character or appearance of the surrounding area to a comparable degree. None of the examples referred to have led me to different conclusions.
20. The appellant has referred to extensive discussions with the Council's officers prior to submitting the planning application, which was subsequently recommended for approval by officers. The Council's elected members were entitled to reach different views to their officers, and I do not apply less weight to their reasoning for refusing the application. I have read the Council's officer report recommending planning permission should be granted, including the Conservation Officer's comments which identify harm, but for the reasons set out above I have reached a different conclusion to the authors of that report on the main issue in this appeal.
21. I have also read representations concerning the original layout of plots forming the Gatehill Farm Estate, which provide an interesting background and underlying context to the current arrangement of the estate. However, I am not persuaded to allow harm to the existing character and appearance of the ASLC based on original plot sizes, which have since been conjoined and subdivided in a number of different ways since the 1920s.

Conclusion

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

L Douglas

INSPECTOR