The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 May 2021

by H Lock BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 June 2021.

Appeal Ref: APP/A2280/W/20/3258531
6 Pump Lane, Rainham, GILLINGHAM, ME8 7AA

- 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 and Mrs E J Chilman against the decision of Medway Council.
- The application Ref. MC/20/1091, dated 12 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 3 July 2020.
- The development proposed is a detached 4-bedroom chalet bungalow on land adjacent to 6 Pump Lane.

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 streetscene.

Reasons

3. The appeal site comprises part of the side garden of 6 Pump Lane (No.6), a detached dwelling in a residential area where Policy H4 of the Medway Local Plan 2003 (LP) supports redevelopment and infilling, but providing that a clear improvement in the local environment will result. The appellants advise that No.6 is a 'double plot', and it is clearly wider than many frontages in the vicinity. The proposal includes the removal of an existing porch and conservatory to No.6, and associated internal alterations, to facilitate the proposed development.

4. The streetscene is mixed, with buildings of varying size, form and architectural style, and this variety also applies to the gaps between buildings. Whilst the character and appearance of Pump Lane may have changed over time as a result of extensions and other alterations, a sense of space nevertheless remains. This is derived mostly from reasonably deep front gardens and plot depths, but spaces between buildings and boundaries also contribute to the character of the area. In particular, many detached properties appear to be flanked to one side by a pedestrian access, and to the other by a garage and/or driveway, creating space to boundaries and between dwellings.

5. Plot widths are not uniform in the streetscene, but the siting of No.6 means that the subdivision would create an unduly narrow appeal site that would not be of typical width in the vicinity. The appellants advise that plot widths in the

immediate locality generally range from 11 to 13 metres, but at approximately 8.3m (as stated at paragraph 5.4.9 of the appellants' Statement of Case) the appeal site would be significantly, and noticeably, narrower. Moreover, narrow frontages for detached properties are the exception in the streetscene and do not reflect the prevailing pattern of development. Figure 5.4 of the appellants' statement provides approximate separation distances between some buildings, but the majority of those identified appear to be materially wider than the smallest gap (1.67m) proposed in this case.

6. The proposed dwelling design would be in keeping with the individual styles on either side, and I note the Council's view that the physical appearance and size of the dwelling would not be harmful in itself, being of a similar height, scale, mass and materials to neighbouring properties in the area. However, whilst the design of the building aims to reduce its scale and massing, a detached dwelling of the size proposed would appear contrived, and 'squeezed' into a disproportionately narrow gap. In comparison with the neighbouring plots and others in the immediate vicinity, it would be cramped relative to the side boundaries and the dwellings beyond. For example, although 4 Pump Lane is positioned close to the boundary with No.6, it retains a characteristic sense of space on its own site as a result of its driveway gap and the distance between dwellings. This would be lacking at the appeal site, and would not be compensated by the depth and openness of the front garden.

7. The appellants have drawn attention to a number of developments approved along Pump Lane, but limited information has been provided of the specific proposals and the circumstances which resulted in the grants of planning permission. Moreover, viewed on the ground they did not appear to be directly comparable to the appeal proposal. As such, on the basis of the available information they offer limited support to this proposal.

8. In view of the above, I conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the streetscene, and would conflict with the aims of LP Policy H4 insofar as it would not result in a clear improvement in the local environment; and with LP Policy BNE1, which amongst other criteria requires development to be satisfactory in terms including layout and siting, and to respect the location of buildings, spaces and the visual amenity of the surrounding area. In so doing, the proposal would be contrary to the design quality aims set out in paragraphs 124 and 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Other Matters

9. The appellants advise that the proposal would modestly increase housing stock and provide housing for local people in a sustainable location relative to transport links and Neighbourhood Centres. However, whilst these factors offer support to the proposal, they would not outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of the streetscene identified above. This harm would not be mitigated by the appellants' proposed conditions in respect of additional landscaping and boundary treatment.

10. Reference is made by the parties to a previously refused planning application for an alternative dwelling (reference MC/20/0687). Whilst I acknowledge the differences between the two schemes, comparison with a development that was more harmful would not justify a proposal that would detract from the streetscene in its own way.

11. Since the determination of the application the appellants have paid a financial contribution as part of a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Scheme, in mitigation for recreational bird disturbance arising from development within a 6km buffer of the Thames, Medway and Swale Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites. However, as I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons, it has not been necessary for me to consider this matter in any further detail.

Conclusion

12. For the above reasons, I conclude that this appeal should be dismissed.

H Lock

INSPECTOR