



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 17 June 2021

by L Douglas BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 JUNE 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/W/21/3269930

1 Langtree Place, North Road, Woking GU21 5FL

- 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 Joshua Wilkinson against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PLAN/2020/0957, dated 18 December 2020, was refused by notice dated 12 February 2021.
 - The development proposed is "change a small area of plants and soft landscaping to hard landscaping to allow additional parking".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are: (i) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area; and (ii) whether the proposed development would provide suitable access to the existing dwellings and parking spaces.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. The appeal site forms part of a gated cul-de-sac of nine dwellings laid out in two rows either side of a communal parking area and interspersed with small soft landscaping strips, in a backland site surrounded by residential and commercial buildings. It is proposed to remove part of a soft landscaping strip adjoining a footpath along the south-western boundary and lay hard landscaping to create an additional car parking space.
4. Soft landscaping within the cul-de-sac forms part of the original planned development and has been well-designed and maintained, occupying small strips in the limited spaces available amongst essential infrastructure such as parking spaces, footpaths and refuse stores. It makes an important contribution to the character and appearance of the cul-de-sac development as a whole and helps soften views of its surroundings to the benefit of all residents within Langtree Place.
5. The soft landscaping along the south-western boundary of the cul-de-sac emphasises the separation between Langtree Place and the rear gardens of properties along North Road and helps prevent the cul-de-sac from appearing too cramped. The parking of cars in existing spaces within the cul-de-sac does not block all views of the soft landscaping or otherwise negate its benefits in these regards. Although the section proposed to be removed would comprise a

small area, it forms a large proportion of soft landscaping within the cul-de-sac and its loss would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the area, as experienced from within Langtree Place.

6. The harm would not be addressed through the use of grasscrete surfacing, as its effect would be wholly different to the planting and it would not sufficiently soften the south-western boundary. The appellant has suggested the planting could be re-located to an alternative location within the cul-de-sac, but no details have been provided to show where it could be re-located. In any case, I am not convinced that re-location of the planting would sufficiently mitigate the harm identified.
7. The proposal would therefore fail to accord with Policies CS21 and CS24 of the Council's Core Strategy¹ and the Council's Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) referring to design and amenity issues². These require, amongst other things, new development to incorporate landscaping to enhance its setting, and provide suitable boundary treatment and a positive benefit in terms of townscape character.

Access to the Existing Dwellings and Parking Spaces

8. By laying hard landscaping in place of the existing soft landscaping, it is proposed to create an additional car parking space, which would incorporate the existing footpath leading to 1 – 5 Langtree Place. Aside from the footpath, I noted that all five of these dwellings could be easily accessed by pedestrians when at least one car parking space is vacant on the north-western side of the cul-de-sac. However, the footpath is the only formal means of pedestrian access to those dwellings in instances when all of those parking spaces are occupied. As with the soft landscaping strips within the cul-de-sac, the footpath was designed as part of the development for a specific purpose. In this case, that was to provide a clear pedestrian access route to those dwellings at all times.
9. Informal pedestrian access to Nos. 1 – 5 would remain between parked cars, but I have not been presented with any detailed evidence to demonstrate this would be entirely sufficient, especially for people in wheelchairs, carrying shopping or pushing bicycles or buggies. The footpath currently provides a formal access point for those dwellings, and although some of the soft landscaping may overgrow the footpath at times, this could be easily addressed during routine maintenance if it restricted access. The footpath therefore provides an important access point for those five dwellings and is not redundant. The appellant has claimed the footpath has not been used since they have resided in the cul-de-sac, but this assertion has not been corroborated. In any event, I must consider the effect of the proposal in the long-term and on all future occupants who may need to use the footpath. I am not therefore convinced that the footpath is not needed.
10. The Council's officer report explains their minimum parking space standard is 2.4m x 4.8m. The report also confirms the overall width of the soft landscaping strip and footpath is 2.6m. Despite the proposed dimensions adhering to the specified minimum sizes, the Council have claimed insufficient

¹ Woking Core Strategy (2012)

² Woking Design Supplementary Planning Document (2015); Woking Outlook, Amenity, Privacy & Daylight Supplementary Planning Document (2008)

information has been provided to demonstrate the proposed parking space would accord with their Parking Standards SPD³, due to the absence of detailed plans showing the dimensions of retained boundary treatment, the proposed parking space or how it would be accessed. The submitted plans clearly show the area which would form part of the parking space, leaving the existing boundary fence exposed and the space safely accessible.

11. Nevertheless, the removal of the footpath would have an unacceptable impact on the accessibility of the dwellings, especially for people with disabilities. Accordingly, the development would still fail to accord with Policy CS21 of the Council's Core Strategy which requires, amongst other things, all development to be designed in an inclusive way to be accessible to all members of the community, regardless of any disability.

Other Matters

12. The appellant has referred to limited parking opportunities in the surrounding area, but a number of parking spaces have been provided within the gated cul-de-sac and there are on-street parking spaces, subject to permits or vouchers, in the locality. I have not been presented with any evidence to demonstrate that the need for an additional parking space in this location would outweigh the harm caused to the character and appearance of the area or otherwise justify the removal of the pedestrian access point to dwellings.
13. I have had regard to the appellant's comments in respect of parking spaces used by neighbouring residents on grassed areas and I note comments received from neighbours who do not object to the proposal, but these submissions do not alter my conclusion on the main issues.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons given above I conclude that the proposal is contrary to the Council's development plan and there are no other considerations that would outweigh the harm I have identified to indicate planning permission should be granted. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

L Douglas

INSPECTOR

³ Woking Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document (2018)