



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 22 June 2021

by James Blackwell LLB (Hons)

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 01 July 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/K3605/W/21/3271102

Petrol Filling Station, Stoke Road, Cobham, Surrey KT11 3AS

- 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 InPost against the decision of Elmbridge Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 2020/2860, dated 28 October 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 December 2020.
 - The development proposed is the siting of an InPost Locker.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the siting of an InPost Locker at Petrol Filling Station, Stoke Road, Cobham, Surrey KT11 3AS in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 2020/2860, dated 28 October 2020, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following conditions:
 - (1) The development hereby approved shall be retained in strict accordance with the following approved drawings: 20-01256_SRC01 (Site Location Plan); and 20-01256_SRC03 (Proposed Elevations).
 - (2) The development hereby approved shall be retained in the materials set out in Section 7 (Materials) of the Application Form received by the Council on 28/10/2020 unless otherwise agreed by the Council in writing.

Preliminary Matters

2. This appeal relates to a retrospective planning application, so references to the development relate to development already carried out.
3. To ensure clarity in the description of development, I have removed duplicated address details, as these are already included elsewhere in the decision.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The application site is located within a petrol filling station (PFS) on the south side of Stoke Road. Alongside the petrol filling facilities, the PFS includes a large forecourt, parking, an advertisement totem, a small shop and car wash facility. There is another click and collect locker adjacent to the side wall of the shop. The appeal site has a commercial appearance, which is typical of a petrol

- filling station. The surrounding area is mostly residential, with residential dwellings located immediately behind the PFS and a nursing home to its east.
6. The locker measures approximately 8m in width, 1m in depth and has a maximum height of approximately 2.4m. In terms of size and scale, it comfortably occupies the area of grass verge between the shop and car wash without appearing bulky or cramped. Due to its siting between the PFS shop and the car wash, the locker is largely obscured from view on the approach to the PFS from both easterly and westerly directions. It only becomes visible directly in front of the PFS. The locker is also sited in front of a boundary wall which separates the PFS from the residential development behind, and because it sits lower than this wall, it cannot be seen from these dwellings. Due to these factors, the visual impact of the locker is not significant. Even where the locker is visible from the public realm, the appearance of the InPost locker is commensurate with the commercial nature of the surrounding structures including both the shop and the car wash, which means it assimilates with the space without appearing incongruous or alien.
 7. The exterior of the locker is mainly stainless-steel which is coloured pale pink. "InPost" branding appears across the front, which is relatively neutral in colour. These colours stood out no more than the tone of other colours used across the commercial signage of the petrol station, the car wash and the other click and collect facility (which is significantly brighter in tone), so did not strike me as garish. The colour palette is befitting of the locker's commercial use, which makes it easily identifiable to customers.
 8. The Council contends that the InPost locker creates visual clutter due to the existing blue locker which is already located on the site. The blue locker cannot be seen at all when entering the site at its western end, as it is hidden from view by the shop. Whilst it is more visible if approaching from the west, it assimilates well with the side of the forecourt shop, as it sits flush with the wall. Much like the InPost locker, its colour and branding are reflective of other signage and branding across the wider PFS, so it does not jar with its surroundings. The InPost locker sits perpendicular to the western wall of the shop on which the blue locker is located, which effectively creates a "corner" of click & collect facilities next to the shop. This arrangement optimises the space between the shop and the car wash, which would otherwise be redundant, and given the size of this space, both lockers can be accommodated without appearing cramped or cluttered.
 9. I agree with the appellant that the development provides certain benefits which help achieve certain sustainability objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which all weigh in its favour. The locker allows goods for different customers to be delivered to a single location which helps reduce congestion on the road network. Its location encourages linked trips, as customers can utilise the click and collect facility at the same time as other services on the site. The click and collect facility also supports the longevity of the business operations of the wider appeal site.
 10. In terms of appearance, the development is in-keeping with the commercial nature of the wider petrol filling station. It optimises space between other commercial structures without appearing bulky or cramped and has been designed using materials and colours which are consistent in tone with other structures and facilities on the site. For these reasons, I am satisfied that the

development would not harm the character and appearance of the area, and would therefore be consistent with policies DM2 of the Elmbridge Local Plan: Development Management Plan (2015) and policies CS10 and CS17 of the Elmbridge Core Strategy (2011). These policies require new development to preserve the character and appearance of the surrounding area through high quality and sustainable design, which demonstrates environment awareness and maximises the efficient use of urban land. The development is also consistent with the overarching objectives of the Framework in terms of design and sustainability.

Other Matters

11. Part of the wider petrol filling station is located within the Tilt Conservation Area. Whilst the development is not within the conservation area, I have still considered its effect on the wider setting of the conservation area due to its proximity. As set out above, I consider that the appearance of the development is consistent with the commercial nature of surrounding structures within the petrol filling station, and therefore integrates with the street scene without harming the character or appearance of the nearby conservation area. This is consistent with the Council's stance on the issue.
12. I note the Council's comments that the development is located in an area which benefits from planning permission (granted on appeal) for an extension to the forecourt building. I have no evidence before me as to whether this development will be carried out, and so it does not weigh on my decision.
13. In terms of comments made by local residents, issues raised regarding the appearance of the scheme have been addressed in the commentary above. Concerns relating to enforcement of existing planning permissions are matters for the Council. In terms of any increase in footfall arising from the development, I agree with the Council that this can be accommodated on the site without causing harm to the amenity of nearby residents. As such, I am satisfied that none of these issues lead to a degree of harm which would justify dismissal of the appeal.

Conditions

14. I have included standardised plans and materials conditions to ensure the development is retained as originally carried out. In terms of the materials condition, I have used "tailpiece" wording to give a degree of flexibility in case the external materials need to be changed or restored in future.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

James Blackwell

INSPECTOR