

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 June 2021

by Martin Andrews MA(Planning) BSc(Econ) DipTP & DipTP(Dist) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th September 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/L3625/W/20/3264316

Whitecroft, Furze Grove, Kingswood, Tadworth, Surrey KT20 6ES

- 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 & Mrs S de Putron-Hill against the decision of Reigate & Banstead Borough Council.
 - The application, Ref. 20/01221/F, dated 15 June 2020 was refused by notice dated 9 November 2020.
 - The development proposed is demolition of the existing and construction of two detached dwellinghouses.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

3. The appeal proposal is to demolish the existing house and divide the plot into two sites of equal size for the development of two houses. The Council's objection is that the combination of the size of the proposed dwellings and their homogeneity in design would result in an overdevelopment that would be incongruous in the locality.
 4. Turning firstly to dwelling size, the appellant's survey of the locality has assessed the plot widths of other dwellings and concludes that at 16.5m each they would be in keeping with many other dwelling plots, particularly in nearby Furze Hill. I have also noted contrary third party comments that Furze Grove itself has a more spacious character and that the proposed plot sub-division would be inconsistent with this.
 5. However, the appeal site is not itself within the Residential Area of Special Character ('RASC') and having inspected the existing plot and its surroundings, I conclude that there is no reasonable basis to regard Furze Grove as an identifiable enclave within its context that warrants a preclusion of further development. Accordingly, two dwellings of an appropriate size and design with any necessary tree retention and additional landscaping have the potential to be accommodated without causing harm to the character and appearance of the area.
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6. As regards the Council's criticism of excessively deep footprints, the grounds of appeal cite other examples and in my view the depth would not be so apparent as to make the appeal scheme unacceptable. Indeed, the application plans show that the dwelling on the south eastern plot closest to Furze Hill would have front garden / dwelling / rear garden depths of 16.5m / 14.2m / 30.0m respectively and a total depth of 60.7m. These partially or totally exceed the dimensions of some of the other development in the area.
7. Notwithstanding my absence of objection to the principle of the sub-division, the Council and consultees, including the Kingswood Residents Association, also object on the basis of the proposed dwellings being of the same design, albeit handed (or 'mirror image'). In a locality characterised by a predominance of individuality of dwelling siting and appearance, I regard this as a major drawback of the appeal proposal.
8. The proposed design is in itself acceptable but its replication in handed form for both dwellings would be too akin to a formulaic approach to design and house type as adopted by volume builders. This concept is frequently used in an estate development, albeit in this case it would be with upmarket buildings. However, the handed pair would draw the eye and be perceived as harmfully inappropriate in a locality, which even outside the RASC, has the difference in the design and appearance of each dwelling as one of its major character assets. And despite the appellant's reference to other developments, I consider that the circumstances of this site do require an individualistic approach.
9. I recognise that a proposal with two dwellings on a very similar building line with the modest, albeit acceptable, gap between them and with the same orientation on the site does present a design challenge. They would need to avoid any clash in materials and design to enable them to be comfortably read together and make a positive addition to the character and appearance of Furze Grove. However, I see no reason why this cannot be achieved.
10. On the main issue, I conclude that in its current form the appeal proposal, due to its homogeneity in design, would be in conflict with Policies DES1 and DES2 of the Reigate & Banstead Development Management Plan 2019; the Council's Local Distinctiveness Guide 2004, and Section 12: 'Achieving Well-Designed Places' of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019.

Other Matter

11. A third party submission argues that the proposed development would dominate and overlook the boundary into the garden of No. 10 Ballantyne Drive. However, the dwellings would be largely offset from this property and together with the mitigating effects of an outbuilding and a protected walnut tree restricting mutual views, I consider that the officer's report has correctly concluded that there would not be an unacceptable impact.

Conclusion

12. For the reasons explained above, I conclude that I should dismiss the appeal.

Martin Andrews

INSPECTOR