



Appeal Decision

Hearing (Virtual) held on 25 & 26 January 2022

Site visit made on 28 January 2022

by Louise Crosby MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/Q4245/W/21/3275268

Greatstone Hotel, 845-849 Chester Road, Stretford, Manchester, M32 0RN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Dowd & Company Limited against the decision of Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 101637/OUT/20, dated 14 August 2020, was refused by notice dated 15 December 2020.
 - The development proposed is outline planning application for the demolition of existing buildings and erection of 56 residential apartments including details on layout, access and scale, with all other matters reserved.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The planning application sought outline planning permission with all matters reserved except for layout, access and scale. Drawings have been submitted showing how the elevations of the building could look. However, as agreed at the hearing, I have treated these as purely indicative.
3. As part of the appeal process the appellant submitted amended floor plans showing improved internal space standards. It was agreed at the hearing that nobody would be prejudiced by me accepting them and determining the appeal based on the revised plans. Consequently, the Council did not seek to defend this element of the fourth reason for refusal.
4. The Council took the decision to not defend their fifth reason for refusal in relation to the effect of the proposal on the living conditions of nearby residents as a result of potential overspill car parking either. I will address these matters briefly below.
5. Two section 106 agreements were submitted with the appeal in the form of unilateral undertakings. Both secure 6 units of affordable accommodation (10%) and one, in addition, secures a financial contribution of £125,896 to primary education. I shall return to this matter later in my report when I consider the public benefits of the scheme.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are:

- i) The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area;
- ii) Whether the proposal would preserve the setting of Gorse Hill Entrance Portal and Lodges; and Stretford War Memorial; and
- iii) Whether the proposal would provide adequate living conditions for future residents of the apartments.

Reasons

The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area

- 7. As set out above, appearance is a reserved matter so although indicative drawings have been submitted, I will consider this matter on the basis of the scale of the proposed building and its position in the site and its effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- 8. The Greatstone Hotel originated as a pair of late 19th century suburban domestic villas. The other Victorian property on the site was also a villa style dwelling originally. It is now used as ancillary accommodation in connection with the hotel. Both are in a poor state of repair. The area to the rear of the buildings is hard surfaced and open. Above the rear brick boundary wall there are views beyond to Gorse Hill Park, tennis courts, a sports hall and in the distance 2 storey traditional dwellings on Talbot Road.
- 9. The proposal involves the demolition of the 2 large residential type buildings and a small domestic single storey garage and the erection of an L shaped building that would be 5 storeys at the front and 4 storeys at the rear. Vehicular access to car parking at the rear would be along the right-hand side of the building, adjacent to Gorse Hill Park, a public park.
- 10. The surrounding area is urban in character with Manchester United Football Ground and Old Trafford Cricket Ground not far away. Chester Road is a mix of residential and commercial properties of varying scale, mass and height. However, the area around the appeal site is characterised by houses and flats ranging from 2 storeys to 4 storeys high. The 4 storey flats opposite the appeal site (Burleigh Court and those at the other side of the park entrance (The Park) have the 4th floor of accommodation in the roofspace which reduces their overall scale and mass. The latter development is also set back from the road behind a car park which is well screened from the road by landscaping, even in winter.
- 11. Similarly, the Greatstone Hotel has 4 floors of accommodation, but part of the lowest floor is partially below ground, and the top floor is in the roofspace. This consists of 2 gable ends facing the street at either end of the building with a dormer in the pitched roof between. This roof arrangement reduces the overall scale and mass of the building, particularly the main central section which, around the dormer, slopes away from the road.
- 12. The other property within the site is 2 storeys high with a pitched roof although it also appears to have a basement as the entrance door is elevated above ground level, reached by a few steps. Beyond the site to the northeast is a

range of commercial prefabricated type buildings including car dealerships, retail outlets and a social club. Travelling in the other direction the character is quite different. This is marked by traditional 2 and 3 storey brick buildings. These tend to be in pairs or short terraces. There is also a Methodist chapel and a traditional terrace of local shops with 2 storeys of residential accommodation above. Whilst there are larger scale developments further afield, including one under construction on Talbot Road, these are not seen in the same context as the appeal site.

13. Although the appeal proposal would not be appreciably taller and would be set back from the road a little farther than the existing hotel building, it would not have the benefit of a varied roof style. Its overall footprint would also be significantly greater than all the existing buildings on the appeal site combined. The front section of the building would be spread across most of the site with just a narrow maintenance strip at one side and the vehicular access to the other.
14. In addition, the leg of the L-shape would extend back into the site to a far greater degree. Whilst this leg would be a storey lower than the front section it would contain a rooftop garden and this would need to be protected by a safety screen or wall of a reasonable height. All of this would combine to create a very large building that even with creative elevational relief would appear excessively large and dominant in the streetscene.
15. The building would also appear very dominant and out of place from Gorse Hill Park which by contrast is flat and open and also from the tennis courts at the rear of the site.
16. The impact would be exacerbated by the fact that there would be very little space remaining at the front, side or rear of the building to provide any meaningful landscaping. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) at paragraph 131, recognises the importance of trees and the important contribution they make to the character and quality of urban environments, such as this.
17. Overall, I find that the proposal would have a significant harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area contrary to policy L7 of the Trafford Core Strategy (CS) in so far as it seeks to ensure that development is appropriate in its context, makes the best use of opportunities to improve the character and quality of the area; enhances the streetscene or character of the area by appropriately addressing scale, height, massing and landscaping works. It would also be at odds with the thrust of the Framework which advocates at paragraph 126, the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places.

Whether the proposal would preserve the setting of Gorse Hill Entrance Portal and Lodges; and Stretford War Memorial

Significance

18. The appeal site is located to the northeast of these listed buildings which are all listed at grade II. Gorse Hill Entrance Portal and Lodges are located adjacent to the appeal site and so can be viewed together side by side in the street scene, particularly from the opposite side of Chester Road where the War Memorial is located. The war memorial is located directly opposite the park entrance and is

seen as part of a group of attractive, historic structures. Indeed, the war memorial was clearly located where it is to be seen from the avenue through the park and in particular through the historic Gorse Hill Entrance Portal.

19. Gorse Hill Entrance Portal and Lodges originated as the entrance to the Trafford Hall Estate a short distance to the north-east along Chester Road. Trafford Hall was built in 1762 for the de Trafford family and later sold in 1896, prompting the transformation of land into the first "industrial estate", now known as Trafford Park. The entrance portal and gates to the estate were constructed in 1868 following the demolition of earlier lodges at Throstle Nest to facilitate the construction of the Cheshire Lines Railway.
20. The entrance portal and lodges were moved to Gorse Hill Park in 1922 in order to provide a grander setting for the new War Memorial on the opposite side of Chester Road and a more substantial entrance to the park. Trafford Hall itself was finally demolished in 1939. Their significance is derived from their connection to the history and development of the surrounding area. They also provide an impressive entrance to the park in a row of otherwise unremarkable buildings this is an important part of their setting which in turn contributes to their significance.
21. Stretford War Memorial was paid for following a public appeal by subscription for the construction of a new War Memorial for the town in 1919. The site chosen was at Gorse Hill, opposite Gorse Hill Park, to the north-east of the town centre, and land was provided for the works by the De Trafford trustees. The new Cenotaph was opened, on Saturday 25th April 1923. The sculptors were J. and M. Patterson. The significance of this structure is derived from its purpose and its association with the local community and its setting close to a public park and Gorse Hill Entrance Portal and Lodges.

Impact of the proposed development on the significance of the heritage assets

22. Dealing first with Gorse Hill Entrance Portal and Lodges, this arrangement currently enjoys quite an open setting which allows it to be fully appreciated in the streetscene and from the park itself. The Greatstone Hotel does not compete with it in terms of its scale or its proximity. By contrast the large apartment building would dominate this part of Chester Road and dwarf the entrance portal and lodges. I realise that it would not be significantly higher than the existing hotel building or apartment block at the other side of the park entrance, but as I have found above the scale and mass of the proposed building would be significantly greater than either of these buildings. It would also be sited much closer to the road than the apartment block at the other side of the park entrance.
23. As such it would harm the setting of the Gorse Hill Entrance Portal and Lodges as their prominence in the streetscene would be greatly reduced as one's eye would be drawn to the much larger prominent modern apartment building. As set out above an important part of the significance of these buildings is their setting which was specifically chosen when they were relocated.
24. Turning to deal with the war memorial, the impact on this would be much less because of its location on the opposite side of Chester Road which is a wide, busy road. However, in some views the war memorial would be seen and experienced in conjunction with the proposed apartment building and the entrance portal and lodges. Overall, the proposal would have an adverse effect

on its setting as part of the group of listed buildings, which I have found contributes to its significance.

Whether the harm would be substantial or less than substantial

25. I find that the proposal would have less than substantial harm to the setting of these designated heritage assets. The harm to the entrance portal and lodges would be at the higher end of the scale and the war memorial at the lower end for the reasons set out above.

Public benefits

26. Both main parties have set out the public benefits that would arise from the development. I will address all of these in turn. I agree that the proposal would result in the redevelopment of a brownfield site, but this could be achieved in a less harmful manner.
27. There would be benefit from the provision of 56 apartments and in particular the 6 affordable units and a potential contribution towards primary education. Whilst some soft landscaping would be provided it would be very limited and a different scheme could provide far more landscaping.
28. The proposal would provide employment during the construction phase and to a lesser degree afterwards. Also, the regional economy would benefit financially. There would be other financial benefits generated from occupants furnishing apartments and also council tax revenue. Similar economic benefits albeit possibly lower, could be achieved with a different scheme.
29. I accept that if a smaller scheme came forward this would be likely to yield lower financial benefits, less housing and less affordable housing, but on the other hand it is likely there would be an increase in benefits such as landscaping. I have attached modest weight to the benefits as a more appropriate scheme could provide similar and, in some cases, greater benefits.

Conclusion

30. The Framework advises when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of whether the harm amounts to less than substantial harm to its significance. In conclusion on this issue, I find that the proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the setting of Gorse Hill Entrance Portal and Lodges; and Stretford War Memorial. The less than substantial harm to the setting of the listed buildings is not outweighed by public benefits, even taking account of the educational contribution which, the appellant disputes is necessary. This harm attracts great weight.

Whether the proposal would provide adequate living conditions for future residents of the apartments

31. This reason for refusal now relates solely to external amenity space within the appeal site. This would consist of a rooftop garden. In addition, 70% of the units would have a balcony measuring between 4 and 6 sqm. The other 30% would have no balcony and would have to rely on the rooftop garden. There would be no ground level outdoor amenity space. Whilst there is a public park adjacent to the site this is not a substitute for private amenity space. A rooftop

garden may be an attractive feature that some residents would choose to use, but in my opinion this site should be developed with some areas of landscaped private ground floor outdoor amenity space for residents to enjoy. The importance of such spaces, or indeed the lack of them was highlighted during the height of the recent pandemic.

32. The proposal would conflict with CS policy L7 in so far as it seeks to ensure the amenity of future residents is not prejudiced.

Other Matters

33. As set out above the appellant submitted amended plans to seek to remedy the Council's concerns about the internal space standards. I agree that these revised plans would provide adequate internal living space for future occupants. The Council's fifth reason for refusal related to concerns about the effect of potential overspill car parking on the living conditions of existing residents living nearby. Following the submission of a technical note by the appellant to justify the parking provision, the Council's highway engineers removed their objection to the scheme and consequently the Council chose not to defend this reason for refusal. I agree that the proposal would provide sufficient car parking spaces and I also saw at my site visit that the site is in an urban area with a good public transport network. The lack of harm in relation to these two matters has a neutral effect on the overall balance.
34. The appellant has submitted 2 completed Unilateral Undertakings both of which would secure 6 affordable housing units and one which would in addition provide for a primary school contribution as set out above. Since I am dismissing the appeal, it is not necessary for me to consider this matter further.
35. In addition, whilst the main parties agree that the Council does not have a five-year supply of housing land I do not need to consider this matter further as the policies in the Framework relating to designated heritage assets provide a clear reason for refusing the development.

Overall Conclusion

36. I have found that the proposal would have a significant harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, great weight must also be given to the harm I have identified to designated heritage assets which is not outweighed by the public benefits. I have also found that the proposal would not provide adequate outdoor private amenity space for future residents of the apartments.
37. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Louise Crosby

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Rebecca Dennis, Pegasus Group
Kevin Dowd, Appellant
Jamie Wood, Pozzoni Architect
Matthew Williams, Williams Conservation Surveying

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

David Pearson, Head of Major Planning Projects
Jeff Davis, Major Planning Projects Officer
Rebecca Coley, Head of Planning and Development
Elisabeth Lewis, Heritage Development Officer

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Councillor Laurence Walsh

DOCUMENTS

Two Unilateral undertakings

Supporting information from the Council pertaining to the education contribution

Written confirmation from the appellant that he agrees to the pre-commencement planning conditions

Map from the Council and agreed by the appellant showing points to be viewed at the unaccompanied site visit

Map from Council annotated by the appellant

E-mail from the appellant enclosing 5-year HLS sent to the Council in advance of the hearing

Copies by e-mail of called-in decision for The Bell Foundry, 32-34 Whitechapel Road, 2 Fieldgate Street, London (ref: 3245430 & 3245432 - 13 May 2021); and James Hall and Company Limited v City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council ([2019] EWHC 2899)

Update 5-year HLS information following discussions between the Council and the appellant during an adjournment of the hearing

Copy of secretary of state decision Ref: PNW/5088/270/42 at Gates & Lodges at Gorse Hill Park Entrance, 847 & 849 Chester Road, Stretford

Copy of Council's decision Ref: 77255/FULL/2011 at Stretford High School and Gorse Hill Park, Stretford – lighting columns and pitches visible when viewed from the A56 through the arch of the lodges