



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 May 2022

by Katherine Robbie BA (Hons) DipTP MTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18th July 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/N5090/W/22/3290118

34-36 Woodlands, Golders Green, London, NW11 9QU

- 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 c/o UPP Architects + Town Planner against the decision of London Borough of Barnet.
 - The application Ref 21/4764/FUL, dated 27 August 2021, was refused by notice dated 1 November 2021.
 - The development proposed is Described as "Demolition of the existing dwellings and erection of a two storey block of flats with rooms and the roof space and basement car park to provide 8no. self-contained units together with 9no. parking spaces. Provision of cycle storage, refuse & recycling and external amenity space".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The address of the appeal site is stated on the application form to be 34 Woodlands. However, I have amended the address of the appeal site to 34-36 Woodlands. This address is cited on the Council's decision notice, accords with the details on the submitted drawings and accords with the address provided by the appellant on the appeal form. Moreover, it accords with my observations on the site visit.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located on a corner plot on Woodlands, close to the junction with Woodlands Close. Woodlands is a quiet, suburban residential road predominantly characterised by detached and semi-detached two-storey houses. Properties appear to share common origins and characteristics. Dwellings are set towards the front of their plots with modest sized front gardens with mature planting and parking. They have been constructed to similar traditional building proportions and scale and broadly fill the width of their plot with longer gardens to their rears. They principally feature bay windows, overhanging eaves, gable features and pitched roofs. This all adds to a sense of harmony and uniformity in the road.
5. Properties including Nos. 34 and 36 are regularly arranged in broadly consistent sized plots with a broadly similar pattern of spacing between dwellings. The area is characterised by a strong sense of harmony and taken

together with the presence of street trees and mature gardens this gives the area a pleasant and verdant feel. As Nos. 34 and 36 share several of these characteristics, I consider that they make a positive contribution to the established character of the area.

6. The proposal involves the demolition of two detached houses. Their plots would be combined to facilitate the construction of eight purpose-built flats. The proposal would be on approximately the same footprint, and would be broadly similar in height, to the existing houses. However, due to the 'crown' style roof which would be steeper in pitch than the surrounding houses and would span the two main parts of the building the proposal would appear far bulkier than the existing houses on the site and the majority of nearby properties. This would be particularly obtrusive given that properties along this side of Woodlands display a consistently similar roof design and scale. The inclusion of several dormer windows into the roof scape would exacerbate that bulkiness and serve to draw the eye towards it.
7. I acknowledge that the existing houses are set close together. However, they are readily apparent as separate buildings, and are accommodated on separate plots which are consistent with the plot size and form within the road. Whilst the proposed design attempts to mimic this pattern of spacing by the inclusion of a recessed area, it would nonetheless, as a result of its continuous and expansive roof mass be read as one continuous building with a consequent width and mass far greater than those of nearby dwellings. Accordingly, it would appear out of scale with the neighbouring built form and contrary to the prevailing plot size and pattern of spacing. Consequently, it would be read as an incongruous and discordant addition within the streetscene.
8. I am mindful that several properties in the road have large roof alterations. However, rather than providing justification for the development in question, if anything, their presence points to a need for such proposals to be carefully controlled if the character and appearance of the area is to be safeguarded. Moreover, I have little information relating to the particular circumstances of these developments and their circumstances appear not to be comparable to the appeal proposal. As such any comparison is of limited relevance in this instance. I have therefore considered the appeal before me on its individual planning merits.
9. The proposal would be a modern interpretation of the some of the architectural features commonly found within the road and would utilise a similar palette of colours and materials. However, this would further serve to accentuate the incongruous appearance of the proposal in the street scene. I accept that a street tree would partially obscure views of the front elevation when the trees are in leaf, however, the building would remain highly visible to pedestrians using the footway and additionally the building would become more readily visible during the winter months when foliage is less dense, and this is not a reason to allow development which is otherwise unacceptable.
10. Furthermore, the introduction of ancillary structures within the amenity space around the flats including cycle storage, bin storage and a car lift for access to basement parking are not features which are commonly visible from the road. Albeit they would be located at the rear of the proposed building they would be readily visible from the road given its prominent corner location and add visual clutter that would be out of character with the street scene. The inclusion of

green roofs to these structures would not serve to soften their appearance and would not be readily apparent from street level. There appears to be little opportunity to pr

11. Policy DM01 of Barnet's Local Plan Development Management Policies (DMP) (2012), amongst other things, seeks to protect the character of established areas of family housing from the cumulative effects of intensification of use resulting from the loss of family housing in roads characterised by houses. The proposal would result in the loss of two substantial family dwellings.
12. The introduction of eight flats, which could accommodate in the region of 23 people in place of two 4 or 5 bedroomed houses would be a materially different form of occupation by reason of the likely significant increase in activity from comings and goings of people and vehicles living as separate households within the flats. Such activity has the potential for additional noise and disturbance to neighbouring occupiers to the detriment of the quiet suburban character of the area. Consequently, the proposal would have an adverse impact on the character of the area which criteria h) and i) of DMP Policy DM01 specifically seek to protect.
13. I have not been presented with any evidence that there is a demand for flats in the area. The general demand for smaller accommodation is also not a justification for the loss of family houses, as this can be provided by other means. Moreover, I have not been provided with any evidence that there is a surplus of 4 or 5 bedroomed houses in the area. I acknowledge that the proposal includes two 3-bedroom units which could be capable of family occupation. Nevertheless, these would not be direct replacements for the type of accommodation which would be lost and there is no guarantee that either of these units would be occupied as such.
14. I acknowledge that there is a current development close by on the junction with Woodlands Close and a small number of other properties in proximity to the appeal site are flats, including Woodlands Court opposite. However, from my observations and the evidence before me, flatted developments are not commonplace on Woodlands which is predominantly characterised by family houses. Moreover, it appears that these developments accommodate less units of accommodation on plots far larger in size than the appeal site and therefore these are significantly different to the scheme before me.
15. Overall, taking all matters into account the appeal scheme would appear as a strident and incongruous addition to the streetscene which would erode the established pleasant, quiet and cohesive character of the area.
16. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would conflict with Policies CS NPPF, CS1 and CS5 of Barnet's Local Plan (Core Strategy) (2012) (CS), DMP Policy DM01, the Council's Residential Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (2016) (SPD) which amongst other things, seek to ensure that new development is of high-quality design that preserves or enhances local character and respects appearance, scale, mass, height and pattern of surrounding buildings, spaces and streets and also seeks to avoid the loss of houses in roads characterised by houses.

Other Matters

17. The structural survey does not recommend the demolition of the building as a solution to structural issues identified at No 34. There is no evidence that No 36 is affected by the same issues. The proposal before me would not be the only solution to rectify the issue should the property need to be replaced in future. Therefore, I am not persuaded by this argument as an overriding reason to allow the appeal.
18. My attention has also been drawn to recent appeals¹ nearby. I do not have the full details surrounding these cases. However, from the limited information I have the decisions were made in a different context to that before me. I note, however, that the inspector for the appeal at No. 78 Woodlands considered that the area to be of a mixed character. I do not agree that this is the case for the appeal before me. The inner block of Woodlands is entirely made up of single-family dwellings and in this context, I consider that the appeal site is located in an area predominantly made up of single-family housing. Likewise, there were a number of flatted schemes within the locality of Hurstwood appeal. In any event I must determine the appeal before me on its own merits.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons given above, the proposal would not accord with the development plan when taken as a whole. There are no material considerations that indicate that the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Katherine Robbie

INSPECTOR

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