



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 July 2022

by T Gethin BA (Hons), MSc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 July 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/W3330/W/22/3294357

Little Stoke, Blenheim Road, Minehead TA24 5QB

- 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 L Dascombe against the decision of Somerset West and Taunton Council.
 - The application Ref 3/21/21/088, dated 17 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 12 November 2021.
 - The development proposed is Erection of a detached dwelling with associated vehicle access and parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. As the proposal is in a conservation area, I have paid special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area, as set out in section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and the Wellington Square Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

4. The appeal site contains a detached building – Little Stoke – which has a considerable scale and mass and a large area to the rear which includes a garden with soft landscaping, some hardstanding and two single-storey outbuildings. This part of the site adjoins the rear garden area of the Promenade Hotel. Although containing various outbuildings/structures, together they form a relatively open, soft landscaped space situated between the surrounding early 20th century buildings which, given their size and form, have a notable prominence in the public realm. Visible from Esplanade, the combined area positively contributes to and helps soften the built-up character of the locality and provides a strong visual contrast with the substantial, striking buildings grouped around it. The character of this part of Wellington Square CA and its significance stems from, amongst other aspects, these substantial buildings and the openness between them. The Council's Conservation Area Review (2003), identifying the enhancing presence of the green space of Blenheim Gardens and the grounds of larger houses, also highlights the importance of open space in this part of the CA and as a whole.

5. With its one and a half storey form, the proposed development would not relate to the scale, mass, height and appearance of surrounding properties. It would therefore appear as an incongruous addition. Furthermore, it would read as a cramped feature due to its position between significantly larger buildings and would erode the sense of openness that exists between surrounding built form.
6. Although situated towards the rear of the site and relatively well separated from the public realm, the proposed dwelling's size and position would mean that it would nevertheless be visible in public views. This includes the full height of its gable end from Blenheim Road via the site access. Although it would be screened to some extent by existing structures and soft landscaping in the adjoining garden, it would also be visible from various points along Esplanade, including on the seafront footway and the closer end-section of footway that turns the corner from Blenheim Road into Esplanade. Accordingly, I observed on my site visit that even though only the upper part of the dwelling would be visible from those points, the harm arising from the appeal proposal would nevertheless be readily observable in the locality.
7. In coming to this view, I have taken into account the size of the proposed dwelling including ridge and eave heights; its footprint compared to the size of the plot and subservience to Little Stoke; its position within the site; that it would replace the existing outbuildings; and that its external materials could reflect that of surrounding properties. In addition, with Blenheim Lodge's elevation from Esplanade broken up by its own gable and soft landscaping, the visual break of it that the proposed dwelling's glazed gable might provide in some views does not lead me to a different conclusion and cannot reasonably be described as an enhancing feature.
8. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area and the Wellington Square CA as a whole. I therefore find that it conflicts with Policies NH2 and NH13 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032 (WSLP). Amongst other aspects, these require development to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas and meet the highest standards of design.
9. In failing to preserve the character and appearance of the CA, I find that the appeal proposal would, in the words of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework), result in less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset. In such circumstances, the Framework requires that the less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits. In this instance, the development proposed would provide some public benefits including adding to the housing stock and mix in the area. However, based on the scale of the development, the extent of these benefits would be modest and do not therefore outweigh the harm I have identified to the CA and the great weight given to the conservation of designated heritage assets.

Other matters

10. Although not a reason for refusal, the Council alleges that the proposed development would harm the living conditions of adjoining occupiers. However, as I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons, there is no need for me to consider this matter further.

Planning Balance

11. I have found that the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area and the Wellington Square CA. In turn, it would conflict with WSLP Policies NH2 and NH13. As such, I find that it would be contrary to the development plan as a whole.
12. As set out in the submitted Design and Access Statement, the site is within the development limits of Minehead and is within a short walking distance to the town's amenities. I recognise that, with much of the site and proposed development situated in flood zone 1, there is also a low risk of flooding and the development would seek to achieve a high standard of sustainability. In addition, the appeal proposal, providing a three-bed family home, would add to the housing stock and mix in the area. However, despite the need for more housing, the benefits would be relatively limited in this instance given the scale of the development. Consequently, I find that the above matters neither outweigh the harm I have identified nor the conflict with the development plan and the great weight given to the conservation of designated heritage assets.

Conclusion

13. For the above reasons, the appeal is dismissed.

T Gethin

INSPECTOR