



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 July 2022

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 July 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/R5510/D/22/3299734

242 Northwood Road, Harefield UB9 6PU

- 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 M Merali against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hillingdon.
 - The application Ref 36557/APP/2021/4630, dated 23 December 2021, was refused by notice dated 19 April 2022.
 - The development proposed is front wall, pillars, and gate (retrospective).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. I have dealt with the appeal based on the submitted plans, which ostensibly align with a wall, pillars and gate that I saw had been installed to the front of the appeal site.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are (i) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area; and (ii) the effect of the proposal on pedestrian and highway safety.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. The appeal site includes a detached dwelling within a ribbon of buildings which line one side of Northwood Road between open fields. The nearby buildings are typically set back from the street behind areas of parking or soft landscaping, and face towards further open land beyond hedgerow to the opposite side of Northwood Road which the Council indicates is designated as Green Belt. Treatments to the front of the sites vary, but the majority are either open; or are defined by relatively low walls, fences and railings and/or by mature soft landscaping. As a result, there is a general feeling of verdant openness to the front of the buildings which complements and provides a sense of transition to the open land opposite. While this part of Northwood Road is on a bus route and carries 2 lanes of traffic, I nevertheless find that these factors contribute a semi-rural character to the area overall.
5. The appeal proposes a brick wall topped by railings and a set of black metal gates between brick pillars. I acknowledge that there is diversity in the nature of boundary treatments nearby, but the appeal development is notably higher

than the gates, walls or fences that I saw in the vicinity, and results in gates with fairly close-set bars and a large expanse of solid wall spanning the width of the site. The appellant has highlighted examples of high hedges that are present nearby, including hedges to the neighbouring dwellings which are of similar or greater height than the development, as well as the dense hedge along the opposite site of Northwood Road. However, the need for access to dwellings means that hedges do not typically extend across the full width of plots, and the soft and natural quality of these features serves in any case to enhance the appearance of the area, reinforcing its verdant, semi-rural character.

6. In contrast, the height of the proposed development together with the materials results in an uncharacteristically formal and harsh visual barrier along the frontage of the appeal site, albeit one through which there are still some views of the dwelling. As well as resulting in an unusual degree of enclosure and giving the site the appearance of being set apart and segregated from its surroundings, this significantly diminishes the open and semi-rural character of this part of Northwood Road and erodes the setting to the open land within the Green Belt opposite. In my judgement, the development stands out as a large and obtrusive feature in the street scene, and detracts from the character and appearance of the area.
7. The appellant indicates that the boundary was formerly marked by fencing and hedge. However, the photograph provided suggests that the fence was much lower than the wall and gates now proposed. While the hedge may have been taller and denser, it did not extend across the full width of the site, and in my view its softer, natural appearance would provide for a more sympathetic boundary than the appeal development.
8. The appellant has also commented that walls and gates become a more prominent fixture as you travel further south along Northwood Road. However, these are some distance from the appeal dwelling beyond open fields and are not visible in the same street view, and I have not in any event been directed to any examples of comparable height to the appeal proposal. I do not therefore find these features to be a compelling justification for the development before me.
9. Irrespective of the use of materials to match the host dwelling, I find for these reasons that the development is not high quality design. It does not assimilate well with its surroundings and I conclude that the proposal causes unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area. As a consequence, there is conflict with Policy BE1 of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1 – Strategic Policies 2012 and Policies DMHB 11, DMHB 12, DMHB 14 and DMEI 6 of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2 – Development Management Policies 2020 ('LPP2'). Together and amongst other things, these policies broadly seek high quality design that respects and is appropriate to local character, that harmonises with the local context taking into account factors including the degree of enclosure in the surrounding streetscape, and that assimilates with adjacent areas of Green Belt.

Pedestrian and Highway Safety

10. The gates are positioned on the front boundary of the site, and the Council is concerned that the lack of a set back could result in vehicles blocking the main carriageway while the gates are opening. However, the evidence before me

indicates that there have previously been wooden gates to the site that would have needed to be opened manually, while those now proposed can be opened remotely on approach to the site, helping to reduce the likely duration of vehicles waiting on the carriageway.

11. I appreciate that this part of Northwood Road is busy and a bus route. Even so, it is relatively straight and vehicles waiting to enter the site would be visible for some distance in both directions. Approaching traffic would therefore be able to adjust speed in good time and, if necessary, stop while the gates opened. Any delays would be likely to be of short duration and fairly low frequency given that the site is occupied as a single dwelling, and having regard to these factors, I do not find that the position of the gates on the boundary results in significant inconvenience or detriment to highway safety.
12. Moreover, the appellant has referred to potential for a gate of up to 1m in height to be installed using permitted development rights under Class A, Part 2 of Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended). I have no firm reason to conclude that such rights would not be applicable here, and there would appear to be a reasonable prospect of these rights being utilised if the appeal is dismissed. I have therefore taken this fallback position into account, and while I have found that the greater height of the boundary now proposed would harm the character and appearance of the area, it seems to me that there would be no significant difference from the fallback in terms of vehicles waiting on the carriageway.
13. Despite the greater height of the boundary, the information before me also indicates that the fence and hedge that were formerly on the boundary of the site would have been likely to present a similar degree of obstruction to visibility towards the north. I therefore consider it unlikely that the potential for conflict with vehicles or pedestrians approaching the site from that direction is increased.
14. However, the fence and post that the appellant's evidence shows were formerly at the boundary closest to 234 Northwood Road were lower than the appeal development, resulting in lesser obstruction to visibility towards the south than would now occur. The appellant comments that pedestrian numbers passing the site are low, and I agree that vehicles exiting the site would be likely to be readily apparent to approaching pedestrians. Based on my observations at my visit though, vehicles would be likely to have traversed some way over the footway and very close to the carriageway, if not onto it, before they would have a full view of the road. I am concerned that the proposal increases potential for conflict or near misses with northbound traffic, particularly where vehicles may be passing the site in the southbound lane as they overtake buses waiting at the bus stop to the opposite side of the road, and so may not be focusing on vehicles that could be leaving the appeal site. Accordingly and in the absence of substantive evidence to demonstrate that suitable standards of visibility could be achieved, I am not satisfied that highway safety is not harmed by the proposal.
15. I therefore conclude that the proposal would be detrimental to highway safety resulting in conflict with Policy DMT2 of the LPP2 which includes requirements that development ensures safe and efficient vehicular access to the highway

network and that it does not contribute to deterioration of safety for road users and residents.

Other Matters

16. The appellant advises that the wall, pillars and gates provide security for parked vehicles and a barrier to prevent children reaching the highway. However, I have not been provided with substantive evidence to demonstrate that a boundary of the height proposed would be necessary to achieve these objectives, and I do not consider that the safety and security benefits identified by the appellant would outweigh the harm that I have found is caused to the character and appearance of the area and to highway safety.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons given above, I find that the proposal conflicts with the development plan when it is read as a whole, and material considerations do not indicate that a decision contrary to the development plan should be reached.
18. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR