
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 June 2022

by Adrian Hunter BA(Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 Sep 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/K0425/W/21/3287351

The White Horse, 95 West Wycombe Road, High Wycombe HP11 2LR

- 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 S Dadd of Streamdown Property Ltd against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council.
 - The application Ref 21/05317/FUL, dated 16 December 2020, was refused by notice dated 4 June 2021.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing Public House and construction of 9 x 2-bedroom flats (C3) with associated hard and soft landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. For reasons of precision and clarity, I have taken the description of development from the Council's Decision Notice.
3. Following the Council's decision on the appeal application, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has subsequently been revised by the Government. As a result, the reference to Paragraphs 190, 192 and 197 as referred to in the Council's decision notice has been moved to Paragraphs 195, 197 and 203. The test in relation to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset remains unaltered.

Application for costs

4. An application for costs was made by Mr S Dadd of Streamdown Property Ltd against Buckinghamshire Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Main Issues

5. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - Whether the existing building to be demolished comprises a non-designated heritage asset; and
 - The effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Heritage

6. There is disagreement between the parties as to whether the appeal building comprises a non-designated heritage asset. In the view of the appellant, the building is of little heritage value, having been much altered over the years and, whilst accepting that it is of some architectural value, does not consider it to be special enough to justify its protection. On the other hand, the Council consider the existing building to be a heritage asset due to its age, the positive contribution it makes to the local character and local distinctiveness, and its association with the evolution of the area.
7. The appeal building clearly forms part of a ribbon of development that historically developed out from the town centre. However, there is no evidence before me to suggest that it was particularly influential or played an important role in this expansion or served any specific purpose. Moreover, there is no evidence before me to demonstrate that the building is of any particular quality or has any links to particular local architects or historic figures, other than its design, which is reflective of the Arts and Crafts movement. Furthermore, whilst the building is of a reasonable age, from the evidence it appears to be similar to a number of others around it.
8. The appeal building is designed in the Arts and Crafts style and is reasonably attractive and well-proportioned. Internally the building has been much altered, with little remaining in the way of original features. Whilst parts are in a poor state of disrepair, in contrast to the internal arrangements, the overall external appearance of the building remains essentially unaltered.
9. The appeal building occupies a prominent position on the corner of West Wycombe Road and Oakridge Road. Due to the topography of the surrounding area, when seen from Oakridge Road, the rear of the appeal building is substantial and relatively imposing.
10. As a result, whilst I agree with the Council that the appeal building makes a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness of the area, I consider that this is more due to its position and prominence, rather than any particular architectural or historic quality of the building.
11. As a consequence, despite the positive contribution the building makes, this, along with its age, does not in my view, give it any more than limited heritage importance. Furthermore, whilst not determinative given the advice contained within the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), I note that the building does not feature on the Council's Historic Environmental Record.
12. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the building is of limited heritage significance and, as a result, on the evidence before me, I do not consider it to be a non-designated heritage asset. Therefore in this respect, Paragraphs 195, 197 and 203 of the Framework, Policies CP9, CP11, DM31 and DM35 of the Local Plan are not relevant.

Character and appearance

13. The appeal site occupies a prominent and important corner location within the street scene. Surrounding development comprises a mix of styles and designs. To the east, is a line of development that includes a number of commercial

- uses, with residential above. To the rear of the appeal site is a former mill building, which is a Grade II listed building that has been converted into flats. These buildings are relatively traditional in their appearance.
14. Opposite the appeal site, the buildings comprise mainly a mix of Victorian properties, interspersed with more modern infill development. Buildings vary in height, but due to the topography, tend to be elevated up from the road.
 15. On the opposite corner of Oakridge Road, is a relatively simple, two storey building, that faces towards the appeal site, with a simple pitched roof. Beyond this, along West Wycombe Road, is a row of 2 storey terraced cottages, positioned close against the footway edge, which are relatively simple in their design and appearance.
 16. Overall, whilst surrounding buildings tend to be a mix of styles and designs, they are relatively small in terms of their scale, mass and bulk, with a mix of pitched and gable roofs.
 17. Whilst the proposed development would be positioned closer to the carriageway along West Wycombe Road than the existing building, it would follow a similar building line to adjoining development. It would however be considerably taller than the neighbouring buildings. As a result, it would be of a greater scale, bulk and mass than those around it, which would be further accentuated by its design and appearance.
 18. When viewed from the surrounding streets, this additional height, bulk and mass would introduce a form of development that would discordantly rise above surrounding properties, in particular those on West Wycombe Road. The proposed development would therefore appear as a prominent, and overly dominant form of development. Given the importance and prominence of the site within the street scene, the proposed development fails to adequately respond to its location and the design and appearance of surrounding buildings. As a result, the proposal would introduce a form of development that would appear out of scale with surrounding buildings, therefore harming the character and appearance of the area.
 19. I note the submission of the appellant with regards to their approach of using the scale and design of the building to emphasise a significant corner or junction, along with their aim to deliver a more modern, iconic replacement building. To my mind however, the design approach in this instance would serve to create a more prominent building on this junction which due to its design and scale would be to the detriment of the area and would fail to make a positive contribution.
 20. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area and, in this respect would be contrary to Policies CP9, DM35 of the Local Plan, Wycombe District Council Residential Design Guide SPD, Housing Intensification SPD and the Framework. These policies, amongst other things seek to ensure that proposals deliver a high quality of design and contribute positively and improve the character of the area.

Other Matters

21. The applicant has drawn my attention to the benefits that they consider the proposal would deliver, including a more sustainable use of the site, the

delivery of new dwellings, environmental improvements and an overall contribution to the regeneration of the area. I do not seek to bring these benefits into question, however, these are not considered to be sufficient to outweigh the harm I have found.

22. I have been referred by the appellant to the positive response to the submitted pre-application enquiry. Whilst I appreciate that the pre-application advice differs from the decision on the appeal application, pre application advice is offered without prejudice to the formal decision on any subsequent planning application. Accordingly, issues relating to the pre-application advice have not had any material bearing on my assessment of the planning issues in this appeal.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Adrian Hunter

INSPECTOR