



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 August 2022

by Hannah Guest BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 SEPTEMBER 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/K3605/W/21/3288912

Crown House, Stokesheath Road South, Oxshott, Leatherhead KT22 0PS

- 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 Martin Blanchard against the decision of Elmbridge Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 2021/2723, dated 27 July 2021, was refused by notice dated 12 October 2021.
 - The development proposed is the erection of detached two storey house with a new triple garage following demolition of the existing bungalow and double garage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. Stokesheath Road South is a private road formed of a narrow carriageway with grass verges. It is lined with large, detached houses on substantial plots, which are often gated. Many of the houses have front boundary treatments made up of mature trees and hedges, which give the road a verdant character. Despite differing forms and styles, the significant scale of the houses and their plots create a feeling of grandeur.
4. The appeal site is positioned away from Stokesheath Road South, behind White Timbers, one of the large residential properties that front the road. It is accessed via an unmade singletrack lane that also provides access to Stokesheath Barn and Stokesheath Farm Cottages, which are set in the adjacent countryside.
5. It may be that on plan the appeal property appears as part of a cluster of houses including those that front Stokesheath Road South. However, in real terms only glimpses of these houses are possible from the appeal site. Together the site's access and position mean that it has a far stronger relationship with the adjacent countryside and the modest rural buildings within it, than the houses on Stokesheath Road South.
6. In comparison, I saw that the adjacent houses, Somersby House, Stoke House and White Timbers, given their access from Stokesheath Road South, substantial plots, positions within those plots, and mature landscaped boundaries, have a far more limited relationship with and effect on the adjacent countryside.

7. The existing bungalow is relatively large and set within a generous plot. It integrates well with its surroundings. Whether or not it is slightly more elevated than the neighbouring properties, it is screened by mature boundary planting, and thus only partly visible from the adjacent countryside. Notwithstanding this, given its single storey scale and traditional materials, it has a humble appearance more in keeping with its semi-rural setting.
8. The proposal would be located in a similar position to the existing bungalow. While it would have a comparable footprint, it would be significantly taller and bulkier. The second storey of the proposed house would be seen above the existing boundary planting and would be clearly visible from the surrounding countryside and access lane. While it would be smaller than neighbouring properties and would have a similar design and style to other properties along Stokesheath Road South, it would appear dominant and incongruous in its countryside setting and not in keeping with the semi-rural character. It may be that the proposal would only be visible from part of the Crown Estate that is not readily accessible to the public and that it would be screened in some views by existing trees. However, the proposed house would be visible to the occupants and visitors of Stokesheath Barn and Stokesheath Cottages, particularly when using the access track.
9. I recognise that in response to a previous refusal of planning permission and dismissed appeal, the design of the proposed house has been altered to reduce its scale, mass and height and remove the neo-Georgian aspects to lessen its grand appearance. However, it does not automatically follow that the proposal would be acceptable. Whether or not the Conservation and Design Officer has been inconsistent in their advice, and even if rural style materials similar to the existing bungalow were used, the proposal's scale and style continue to exert a grand appearance that is not in keeping with its semi-rural setting.
10. I am aware that the Council doesn't have any apparent concerns relating to the Grade II listed Stokesheath Barn, which has recently been rebuilt. I saw that, although the barn is located some distance from the appeal property and is at a lower level, it shares the same rural surroundings. It is a relatively large and prominent structure, however, given its historic purpose, simple rural form, and materials, it is undoubtedly in keeping with the character of its rural surroundings. I understand that there is permission to develop the barn into a dwelling, which would include additional wings of accommodation. While the resulting residential development may have a larger footprint than the proposal and a comparable ridge height, I have no substantive evidence before me regarding the appearance of the approved development. Furthermore, although the barn has been rebuilt, there was no indication that the remainder of the development had started, and there is no guarantee that it will be delivered. Therefore, the possible effect of this development carries limited weight.
11. Accordingly, for the reasons above, I find the proposal by virtue of its scale, bulk, height, and design would harm the character and appearance of the area. Therefore, it would conflict with policies CS10 and CS17 of the Elmbridge Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2011), policies DM2 and DM12 of the Elmbridge Local Plan Development Management Plan (2015) and the Elmbridge Design and Character Supplementary Planning Document (2012). These seek, amongst other things, to deliver well designed new development that integrates with and preserves or enhances local character. It would also conflict

with the aims of Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework to create high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings.

Other Matters

12. The appellant has suggested that the proposal would deliver a number of benefits including, replacing the aging bungalow, providing an efficient use of land and contributing positively to the borough's housing stock. While I do not doubt that the proposal would have beneficial effects, these are not significant enough to outweigh the harm I have identified above.
13. The appellant also suggests that the proposal would be built to a high standard that would incorporate the latest technology to reduce carbon emissions and provide an extremely energy efficient home. However, I have no substantive evidence before me to support this. Therefore, I can only afford it limited weight.
14. While the proposal would not harm the living conditions of the occupants of Stokesheath Barn, the absence of such harm does neither outweigh the harm I have identified or justify conflict with the development plan.
15. It has also been put to me by the appellant that the Council failed to work proactively on the application. Whether or not that was the case, and while I appreciate the appellant's willingness to change the design during the application process, I must consider the appeal before me. I have concluded that it would harm the character and appearance of the area. The harm I have identified relates to the fundamental design of the proposal and could not be addressed by condition.

Conclusion

16. Accordingly, for the reasons above, I find that the proposal would conflict with the development plan read as a whole. It has not been demonstrated that there are any material considerations of sufficient weight to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with it. The appeal therefore should be dismissed.

Hannah Guest

INSPECTOR