



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 December 2022

by A M Nilsson BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 January 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/E5330/W/22/3300344

1A Griffin Road, Plumstead SE18 7QG

- 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 S&B Carpentry Limited against the decision of Royal Borough of Greenwich.
 - The application Ref 21/1868/F, dated 16 May 2021, was refused by notice dated 6 January 2022.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of existing structures and construction of new mixed use building and associated landscaping.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are 1) whether or not the proposed development would provide an appropriate mix of dwellings, and 2) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Housing mix

3. The proposed development would include the provision of 7no. dwellings. Three of these would be one-bedroom, two person units, and the remaining four would be two-bedroom, three person units.
4. Policy H2 of the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy and Detailed Policies (2014) sets out that a mix of housing types and sizes will be required in all developments and should contain a proportion of 3, 4 and 4+ bedroom units. The policy also sets out that the exact mix on each site will vary according to the location of the development and the character of the surrounding area and will be affected by factors such as the level of accessibility to public transport or where there is a poor external environment.
5. Policy H10 of The London Plan (2021) outlines that schemes should generally consist of a range of unit sizes and to determine the appropriate mix of unit sizes in relation to the number of bedrooms for a scheme. Applicants and decision-makers should have regard to, amongst other things, robust local evidence of need where available; the requirement to deliver mixed and inclusive neighbourhoods; the mix of uses in the scheme; the nature and location of the site, with a higher proportion of one and two bed units generally more appropriate in locations which are closer to a town centre or station or

with higher public transport access and connectivity; the aim to optimise housing potential on sites; the ability of new development to reduce pressure on conversion, subdivision and amalgamation of existing stock; and the need for additional family housing and the role of one and two bed units in freeing up existing family housing.

6. Although Policy H2 does not outline what dwelling mix is required to be achieved, the fact that the proposed development would not deliver any units with three or more bedrooms would be in conflict with this requirement of the policy. The policy does however acknowledge that the exact mix will vary on each site according to a number of factors.
7. The appeal site is situated in very close proximity to Plumstead train station which I estimated to be around a two to three minute walk from the appeal site. There is also a bus stop directly opposite the appeal site on Orchard Road. Given the accessibility and proximity to public transport, it is clear that the appeal site is in the type of location identified in the above policies where a higher proportion of one and two bedroom units would be more appropriate.
8. The appeal site is located directly to the rear of Plumstead High Street which is a busy and predominantly commercialised area. The site constraints are such that there is limited opportunity to provide meaningful private outdoor amenity space that would be expected in larger family housing. Additionally, there appears to be a wide range of residential properties, including purpose built flats, in the surrounding area.
9. There is limited robust evidence from either party in relation to the specified need for a particular dwelling mix. The appellant has drawn to my attention that Policy H10 of The London Plan identified one of the factors that decision makers should have regard to, where robust local evidence of need is not available, is the range of housing need and demand identified by the 2017 London Strategic Housing Market Assessment. The appellant highlights that in this report, there is an identification that more than 50% of market homes should be 1 and 2 bedroom homes.
10. Whilst I acknowledge the conflict with the local plan policy, the proposed development would go some way to reduce pressure on conversion, subdivision and amalgamation of existing stock of larger houses. By offering smaller units it would also offer the potential to free up larger units in the housing stock from those wishing to downsize. I am also mindful that the development as a whole delivers a relatively small number of units. Therefore, the conflict with the policy as identified above will not cause significant levels of harm.
11. The Government's objective as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) (the Framework) is to support sustainable housing growth. The proposed development would result in the creation of 7no. additional dwellings to the Council's overall housing number and would be in a sustainable location. It would also be on previously developed land and bring a number of additional residents to the area who would contribute to the local economy. Collectively, I give these matters moderate weight in favour of the proposed development, which when combined with the other factors given above, outweighs the minor harm that would be caused due to the conflict with the local plan.

12. I therefore consider that due to the site location, the characteristics of the area and the design constraints of the site, it would not be appropriate in this case to provide the dwelling mix as outlined in Policy H2 of the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy and Detailed Policies (2014). The proposed development would comply with the requirements outlined in Policy H10 of The London Plan (2021).

Character and appearance

13. The proposed development comprises commercial use on the ground floor and residential use on the upper floors. The building would be four storeys in height. The appeal site is part of a quadrant shaped cluster of two-storey properties with outbuildings which is formed by Plumstead High Street, Griffin Road and the 'L' shaped form of Orchard Road. Although there are some three and four storey developments in the wider area, the immediate surroundings within the cluster are of a notably lower scale of development which the proposal, at four storeys in height, would significantly depart from.
14. The topmost fourth storey of the building has been set in from the sides and slightly from the front, and a different design approach has been adopted to that of the rest of the building. Whilst this is with a view to relieve the dominance of the building, it nevertheless significantly contributes to the overall bulk and mass of the building.
15. Due to its overall scale and mass, the proposed development would appear visually dominant and discordant with the lower rise buildings surrounding it. There would be a stark increase in height from the lower rise buildings that sit to the rear of the properties on Plumstead High Street and those which front onto Griffin Road.
16. I acknowledge the presence of a four-storey building located on the corner junction between Plumstead High Street and Orchard Road. Unlike the appeal proposal, which abruptly increases in scale from the buildings on Plumstead High Street, this building continues the scale used on Plumstead High Street through to the rear of the site. Its presence does not lead me to conclude in favour of the appeal proposal, which I have in any event determined on its own individual planning merits.
17. Similarly, the appellant has referred to the 18 storey Elmgrove Point development. I acknowledge its presence as a visually prominent building in the area. It is however a separate standalone development that appears to be an, albeit highly noticeable, exception to the prevailing scale and form of the area around the appeal site. Furthermore, whilst it is visible from the appeal site, it is somewhat removed. For these collective reasons, it does not lead me to conclude in favour of the proposed development.
18. The Council have referred to the harm that the proposed development would cause to the appreciation of the butterfly roofs of the properties on Plumstead High Street, which are locally listed buildings. Although I have identified harm in terms of the scale and mass of the development, including how it relates to the locally listed terrace, I am not persuaded that the visual obscuring of the butterfly roofs from certain public vantage points would cause significant harm. The roofs would remain appreciable from public vantage points elsewhere on Orchard Road. I therefore do not find conflict with the heritage requirements of the relevant policies of the local plan or the Framework in this regard.

19. The Council are of the view that the position of the appeal site and the nature of the development would constitute 'backland development' and thus Policy H(c) of the local plan is applicable. Although the site is to the rear of properties on Plumstead High Street, its site address on Griffin Road, and that the development would form part of the Orchard Road street-scene do not lead me to conclude that the proposal would constitute 'backland development'.
20. Whilst I have considered that the benefits of the scheme in terms of housing provision, being in a sustainable location, on previously developed land and bring a number of additional residents to the area who would contribute to the local economy, would outweigh with the requirement to deliver a mix of dwellings, on the matter of character and appearance, I do not consider that these benefits outweigh the significant harm that would be caused.
21. The proposed development would therefore cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would be contrary to Policy DH1 of the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy and Detailed Policies (2014) and Policies D3 and D4 of The London Plan (2021). These policies require, amongst other things, that developments are of high-quality design having regard to the scale, height, bulk and massing of the adjacent townscape, and that development proposals should enhance local context by delivering buildings that positively contribute to local distinctiveness through their scale, with due regard to existing and emerging street hierarchy, building types, forms and proportions.

Other Matters

22. I acknowledge that support was received to the proposed development. I have acknowledged the benefits of the development in my assessment and the impact on the character and appearance of the area due to elements of its design. Reference has been made in relation to the proposed materials. The specific materials that have been proposed are not in dispute and they do not alter my findings on the main issues above.
23. The appellant has referred to the proposed development constituting an improvement on the current environment. I do not consider the existing situation causes such significant harm to the character and appearance of the area, and whilst certain aspects of the proposed development would be more visually pleasing than the existing environment, this is a benefit of minor weight that does not outweigh the harm I have identified. Furthermore, I am not convinced that the proposed development is the sole means of achieving this benefit.
24. The appellant has commented that the perceived impact is without scrutiny by urban design or conservation officers, as required by Policy D4 of the London Plan. Having identified that harm would be caused by the proposed development, this would not be a reason to allow the appeal.

Conclusion

25. Although I have found that the property mix of the proposed development would not be unacceptable for the reasons set out, the significant harm that would be caused to the character and appearance of the area, is not outweighed by the collective benefits of the scheme, including the delivery of housing and employment use.

26. The proposed development would therefore conflict with the development plan and there are no identified other considerations, including the Framework, that outweigh this conflict.
27. For the reasons set out above, and having had regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A M Nilsson

INSPECTOR