



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 January 2023

by G Ellis BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1 February 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/N1730/D/22/3305783

Delilah Lodge, 30 Wood Lane, Fleet GU51 3EA

- 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 Power against the decision of Hart District Council.
 - The application Ref: 22/00798/HOU, dated 7 April 2022, was refused by notice dated 16 June 2022.
 - The development proposed is the removal of roof and creation of a first floor, replacement porch, demolition of conservatory and erection of a single storey rear extension and alterations to windows.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The description of development is taken from the Council's decision notice and the appeal form. This more clearly and comprehensively describes the development and I have used it for my decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposal would conflict with the Fleet Neighbourhood Plan and effect the supply of bungalows suitable for occupation by older people.

Reasons

4. Delilah Lodge is a detached bungalow set back from the road. The neighbouring properties are a two-storey dwelling to the south and a chalet bungalow to the north. It lies within the urban area of Fleet which is covered by the Fleet Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2032 (FNP).
5. FNP Policy 11 seeks to safeguard the building stock for people with limited mobility and older residents. The first criterion of the policy defines the form of development which will not be supported – *"the conversion of bungalows (a bungalow is a house which has only one level, and no stairs) to a house comprising two or more storeys that will result in the loss of local homes especially suited to occupation by older people.."*. The appeal proposal would alter the existing bungalow into a large two-storey house. The appellant, however, argues that there is no conflict with the policy as the conversion does not result in the loss of a home especially suited to occupation by older people

and suggests that the proposed development is more accessible than the current bungalow.

6. The supporting text to Policy 11 explains that the aim is to maintain the stock of bungalows within Fleet Parish area for use by people with limited mobility including people with disabilities and older residents. It also explains that Fleet's older bungalows, which the appeal property is representative of, are suitable for single level living and adaptation for people with limited mobility. There is nothing before me to suggest that the existing bungalow, which is of a modest size but includes 3 bedrooms, is not suitable for occupation by an older person or could not be adapted. Nor does the appellant advocate that the conversion provides modifications to support independent living in line with criterion 2 of FNP Policy 11. Therefore, the proposal would result in the loss of a bungalow which is especially suited to occupation by older people.
7. In support of this position is the appeal decision referenced by the main parties relating to a bungalow in Basingbourne Road¹. The full details of that scheme are different, nonetheless paragraph 17 of that appeal decision indicates that the conversion of a modest bungalow into a significantly larger two-storey property would fail to comply with the first criterion of Policy 11. The appeal decision also concludes that *"the appeal scheme would be in conflict with FNP Policy 11 which seeks to ensure that the stock of single storey properties within Fleet Parish which are suitable for independent occupation by persons of limited mobility is not eroded as a result of proposals to convert a single storey dwelling into one with 2 or more storeys"* (paragraph 21).
8. I acknowledge that the proposed dwelling would incorporate a downstairs bedroom with ensuite and other provisions to aid access and adaptation. It thereby could provide accommodation for those with restricted mobility including older people. However, this does not necessarily make it more suited, and the policy does not specifically seek levels of accessibility. As the supporting text explains there are several reasons why the retention of bungalows is sought including: supporting downsizing, providing an alternative to small apartments, and supporting independent living, along with the issues of a limited stock and an increasing older population. Therefore, I am not convinced that the proposed large two-storey dwelling would reflect the objectives of this policy taken as a whole, and the inherent flexibility and sustainable form of accommodation a bungalow could provide.
9. In this case I accept that there is a fallback to utilise the loft space for bedrooms through the utilisation of Permitted Development Rights which is supported by a Lawful Development Certificate (Council reference 22/01415/LDC). This would create first floor accommodation and there is nothing before me to suggest this could not be implemented. However, it would not fundamentally alter the scale of the property, and the bedroom space would be restricted by the roof slope. This would be significantly different to the proposed 5-bedroom family sized house, and which is a revised proposal following an earlier larger scheme with accommodation over three floors (Council reference 21/02989/HOU). As such, I find that the proposal offers something very different to the existing property, even with the utilisation of the roof space, and compared to the type of accommodation the policy seeks to maintain for older people to live independently.

¹ APP/N1730/D/20/3259713 - 35a Basingbourne Road, Fleet GU52 6TG

10. The Council have found the scale and design of the proposed dwelling would be acceptable and given the surrounding properties I have no reason to disagree. However, compliance with other policies is a neutral matter and I do not find the other considerations amount to benefits which would outweigh the harm.
11. Therefore, for the reasons given above I find that the proposal would fail to accord with FNP Policy 11 which seeks to safeguard the supply of bungalows suitable for occupation by older people and those with limited mobility.

Other Matters

12. The appellant has referred me to a number of other planning applications where the conversion of a bungalow has been permitted. From the examples provided there appears to be some variation in the Council's approach to applying FNP Policy 11 and I understand the appellant's frustration in that regard. However, it is not for me to review other decisions of the Council and I have considered this proposal on its own merits and the evidence put before me.

Conclusion

13. For the reasons set out the appeal is dismissed.

G Ellis

INSPECTOR