



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 January 2023

by Robin Buchanan BA (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 February 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/N1730/W/22/3295551

83 Elvetham Road, Fleet, Hampshire GU51 4HL

- 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 Christopher Bunce against the decision of Hart District Council.
 - The application Ref 21/02756/FUL, dated 22 October 2021, was refused by notice dated 23 December 2021.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a 4 bedroom house, detached garage and extension of existing driveway.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the North Fleet Conservation Area (the CA).

Reasons

3. No.83 is a large, detached two-storey house in a row of houses along the south side of Elvetham Road. It sits behind a deep front garden in a wide, spacious and well-treed plot on the edge of the CA. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that heritage assets, such as conservation areas, are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance; any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.
4. In this case significance includes a largely intact, mainly historic pattern of contrasting areas of mostly low density housing, usually centrally placed on plots with wide margins, interspersed within an abundance of mature trees and shrubbery. Key features of Character Area 7, which covers part of the CA on the south side of Elvetham Road, include mainly large detached two-storey houses set in spacious wooded plots set back from roads. No.83 therefore makes a positive contribution to the significance of the CA.
5. The plot would be sub-divided for a large, detached two-storey house and detached single garage on the northwest side of No.83. Apportioning about half of the existing garden to the appeal site would reflect the residual garden area and plot size at No.83. It would also be broadly comparable in the ratio of building footprint to site area, including at some other houses nearby taken individually. However, although No.83 is off set towards one side boundary that is not justification per se to develop the other half of the plot with a house. The

two resulting plots would be significantly narrower than the existing plot and nearly all other plots along the south side of Elvetham Road, west of Church Road. Moreover, both houses would not be centrally placed on their plots and, in particular, be very close to one side boundary.

6. The siting of the house, roughly equidistant between No.83 and No.87a Elvetham Road to the west, and its long, albeit cranked floor plan would fundamentally erode the wide gap between these two houses, substantially reducing openness. Furthermore, the compressed spacing of three houses to each other would give a more cramped, built-up arrangement of buildings. Allied to the close proximity of the house at No.87 Elvetham Road, next to No.87a on its south side, this resulting cluster of houses would also cumulatively cause a marked increase in the density of development within this particular pocket of land and part of Character Area 7.
7. The front elevation of the house would coincide with the blue dashed 'building line' shown in the appellant's plans. Nevertheless, the house would be level with No.87a and partly forward of No.83, encroaching into some of the existing front garden. It would be notably closer to Elvetham Road than many other houses behind this building line, which are distinctly further from the road.
8. The proposal would, therefore, be out of keeping and at odds with the prevailing layout and sequence of residential development along this particular section of the south side of Elvetham Road. This intensification of residential development would undermine the significance of this part of the CA and adversely affect the overall integrity of the CA. The incongruous presence of the development, especially the upper parts of the house, would be glimpsed in some public views from Elvetham Road through or over intervening planting, especially in winter months. That there would not be greater public visibility does not mean absence of innate adverse impact on the CA.
9. The houses along the north side of Elvetham Road are different in form or layout and not in the CA, so do not contribute to its significance. Those on the south side of Elvetham Road, east of Church Road are generally smaller or more tightly spaced and on smaller or narrower plots closer to Elvetham Road, so more conspicuous in the streetscene. This nuance within Character Area 7 is too far from the site and separated by intervening buildings or trees to provide an appropriate context for development on it. The spacings between houses elsewhere in the CA that I have been referred to, in the main, relate to pairs of dwellings or are in more spacious surroundings or in a different Character Area so are not directly comparable.
10. The house would be high quality in design and respect the size, external appearance and materials of No.83, including a sympathetic 1920s Arts & Crafts style and Crittall fenestration. In these regards it would also complement other houses nearby. There is no objective evidence that more than two trees on the site, which are lower value category C, would need to be removed to ensure satisfactory internal or external living space. A significant number of trees would be retained, including those making the most important contribution to visual amenity in the CA.
11. Nevertheless, I find that the proposal would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA or the CA overall. Consequently, it conflicts with Saved Policies GEN1 and URB18 of the Hart District Local Plan April 2009, Policies 10, 15 and 16 of the Fleet Neighbourhood Plan November 2019 and

Policy NBE8 of the Hart Local Plan April 2020. These policies aim to preserve or enhance a conservation area and its significance, reinforce local distinctiveness, respect historic plot boundaries or shapes and avoid sub-division of plots.

Other Matters

12. The appeal site is within a zone of influence of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (the SPA), designated due to its habitat for important ground-nesting bird species. The appellant has submitted an executed unilateral undertaking and considers it would secure financial contributions towards measures to mitigate the impact of the proposal by virtue of additional population visiting the SPA, thus overcome the Council's second reason for refusal.
13. The proposal is a revised scheme further to previous refusals by the Council and dismissed appeals for similar development at No.83. I also appreciate the appellant considers that it overcomes the previous objections. While I have taken those decisions into account, I have considered the current proposal, and determined the current appeal, on its individual planning merits.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

14. Through the Framework the Government seeks to significantly boost the supply of homes. The proposal would make efficient use of a small windfall site within an existing settlement where housing development is acceptable in principle. However, there is conflict with the development plan. The harm to the CA would be less than substantial, a matter to which I am required to give considerable importance and weight. This harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In this case, the modest social and economic benefits from a single dwelling would not, therefore, outweigh the harm.
15. Since I intend to dismiss the appeal for this reason, there is no need for me to consider the SPA any further as to do so would not affect my decision or alter the outcome of the appeal.
16. The proposal does not accord with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, to indicate that the decision should not be made otherwise than in accordance with the development plan. Consequently, for the reasons given above the appeal does not succeed.

Robin Buchanan

INSPECTOR