



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 March 2023

by Jane Smith MA MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 April 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/J1535/W/22/3305980

32 Alderton Hill, Loughton IG10 3JB

- 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 Peter Digwa against the decision of Epping Forest District Council.
 - The application Ref EPF/3230/21, dated 14 December 2021, was refused by notice dated 15 March 2022.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing house, outbuilding and garage. Erection of two/single storey detached house with rooms in the roof.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033 (EFDLP) was adopted by the Council on 6 March 2023, while the appeal was under consideration. Both main parties have had the opportunity to comment on the implications of this newly adopted development plan and I have had regard to it when considering the appeal.
3. The Council has further advised that the Epping Forest District Local Plan adopted 1998 and the Epping Forest District Local Plan Alterations (2006) will be revoked following the end of the six-week period for any legal challenge in relation to the newly adopted Local Plan. I have therefore also had appropriate regard to these earlier development plan documents, which remain in place at the time of this Decision.
4. On 20 January 2023, the Council confirmed that prior approval was not required for demolition of the existing dwelling on the site (application ref EPF/2934/22). I have had regard to comments from both main parties on the implications of this decision, which was made after the application was determined.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to its design and elevational detailing.

Reasons

6. Alderton Hill is a street of substantial detached dwellings in large plots, ascending steadily from nearby Loughton town centre. At the bottom of the hill

there are several larger-scale buildings including a school and retirement flats. Beyond that, the street scene is characterised by individually designed dwellings in generous gardens. As the land rises, the extent of garden planting tends to increase and mature trees and hedges provide a leafy quality to the street scene. The oldest dwellings appear to date from the early 20th century and incorporate elevational detailing typical of that period, including some attractive decorative features. There are also several more modern dwellings, in a variety of styles.

7. The appeal site is about half way up the hill and is one of the larger plots. It currently contains a two storey dwelling with additional accommodation in the roof. This appears to be one of the older dwellings, built in the Arts and Crafts style. The surrounding plot is relatively open. At the time of my site visit, planting in the garden was limited to a relatively sparse front boundary hedge and some scattered trees towards the rear of the site, behind the dwelling.
8. In this central section of Alderton Hill, there is a relatively high proportion of older properties generally standing in mature gardens. Typically, these have a relatively informal, a-symmetrical design form, while still being of a substantial scale. Where there have been more contemporary additions, they are well integrated into the rhythm of the street scene, often incorporating detailing typical of the older properties. There is a harmonious variety to the street scene, with no individual dwelling appearing dominant or discordant.
9. As well as being on one of the larger and more open plots, the proposed dwelling would have an imposing neo-classical design. Elevational features such as the over-scaled central portico entrance, symmetrical double gables and numerous geometrically arranged window openings appear designed to attract attention. The architectural approach would give the dwelling a grand and somewhat palatial appearance which would dominate, rather than integrate with, its surroundings.
10. Although there are other nearby dwellings with a neo-classical style, most of these are grouped towards the bottom of the hill, closer to the town centre. This lower part of Alderton Hill generally has more limited soft landscaping to the street frontage, such that the buildings and hard landscaping are more visually dominant. It is also closer to the larger scale development around the edge of the town centre. Overall, this lower area has a more urban and less leafy character than the upper parts of the hill, where the appeal site is located.
11. The proposed use of vernacular materials is a positive factor, as is the alignment of the proposed dwelling on the established building line and its comparable overall height to the surrounding properties. The reduced scale of the outer wings to either side would provide a sense of space around the building, proportionate to the scale of the plot. However, these positive features are not in themselves sufficient to prevent the dwelling appearing unduly imposing. While additional landscaping could also be introduced this would take time to become meaningfully established and would not fully mitigate the contrast with the surrounding development.
12. The existing dwelling and outbuildings are in poor condition, but they are not unsightly and do not currently detract from the street scene. In any event, the principle of replacing the dwelling, including making more extensive use of the wide plot, is not at issue, since the Council has raised no objection to

demolition of the existing dwelling. Furthermore, given the established character of the area, a substantial replacement dwelling could be accommodated in principle, subject to an appropriate design approach.

13. However, I find that the particular design and elevational treatment of the appeal proposal, on this large, open site, would not respond positively to the character of its surroundings. Instead, it would interrupt and dominate the surrounding street scene to a harmful degree.
14. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to its design and elevational detailing. It would conflict with relevant requirements in Policy DM9 of the EFDLP and relevant paragraphs of the National Planning Policy Framework. These policies, amongst other things, require that new development achieves a high quality of design and that it contributes to the distinctive character of the local area and relates positively to its context.
15. The proposed development would also conflict with saved Policy DBE1 of the 1998 Local Plan which requires, amongst other things, that new buildings respect their setting in terms of detailing.

Other Matters

16. I have had regard to the absence of heritage designations, the negative response from Historic England to an application for inclusion of the existing dwelling on the statutory list and the Council's confirmation that the existing dwelling is neither locally listed nor regarded as a non-designated heritage asset. I have further noted that the Council has confirmed that prior approval is not required for its demolition.
17. The proposal would be a one-for-one replacement of an existing dwelling, albeit one which is currently vacant. Therefore, any benefits associated with the proposed redevelopment of previously developed land would be inherently limited. The use of land would not be notably more efficient, given that only a single dwelling is proposed on a very substantial plot. For similar reasons, any benefits associated with the site's good access to local town centre facilities, including its contribution to the local economy, are inherently limited.
18. Taking account of the very recent adoption of a new Local Plan, there is no clear evidence before me which would indicate that the Council cannot demonstrate a deliverable five year housing land supply, or is otherwise failing to meet its housing targets. In any event, the proposed development would not increase the supply of housing in numerical terms.
19. I have had regard to recently permitted developments which have been drawn to my attention, including some which adopt a similar architectural language. However, for reasons explained above, the context surrounding these other sites differs from that surrounding the appeal site and none are so directly similar as to outweigh the harm I have identified in this case.
20. The presence of larger scale flats and school buildings at the bottom of the hill is of limited relevance since these are located on the edge of the town centre, where the presence of more substantial buildings in mixed use is consistent with character and function of their surroundings. Furthermore, the presence of some earlier development which both main parties describe as unsympathetic

does not amount to justification for further erosion of the character and appearance of the area.

21. The proposed development would adopt more sustainable construction techniques, with associated benefits in terms of energy efficiency. However, any contribution to mitigation of climate change is tempered by the proposed demolition of an existing building and associated demand for new materials and energy consumption in the construction process
22. The relationship with neighbouring properties would be similar to existing, so there are no clear benefits to the living conditions of surrounding occupiers. Absence of identified harm in relation to compliance with internal and external space standards, access and parking, the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers, the effect on existing trees and provision for refuse and recycling are neutral factors which weigh neither for nor against the proposal.
23. The advice offered by the Council prior to submission of the application was explicitly advisory in nature and not binding on the Council's consideration of the application, taking account of all matters raised at that stage, including by interested parties.

Conclusion

24. For the reasons given above, having had regard to the development plan as a whole, along with all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Jane Smith

INSPECTOR