



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 March 2023

by R Jones BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 April 2023.

Appeal Ref: APP/Q4245/D/22/3313436

Beechthorpe, Bowdon Road, Altrincham WA14 2AJ

- 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 and Mrs Hansen against the decision of Trafford Council.
 - The application Ref 107006/HHA/22, dated 20 January 2022, was refused by notice dated 19 October 2022.
 - The development proposed is proposed new vehicular access and associated works including erection of new gate posts and automatic gates, blocking off of existing access and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for proposed new vehicular access and associated works including erection of new gate posts and automatic gates, blocking off of existing access and associated works at Beechthorpe, Bowdon Road, Altrincham WA14 2AJ in accordance with the terms of the application, 107006/HHA/22, dated 20 January 2022, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plan: Proposed and Existing Site Plans, Location Map and Street scenes – drawing ref. 923-P-01-D.
 - 3) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Tree Protection Method Statement by Lally Tree Management, Report No: LTM0585.MS.01 received 30th August 2022.

Preliminary Matter

2. The description of development in the banner heading above has been taken from the Council's decision notice as it accurately describes the development now before me, which was amended during the course of the planning application to encompass the proposal to block up the existing access.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this case is whether or not the proposal would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Devisdale Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. Beechthorpe is a large, detached dwelling, dating from the mid-C19th, set within generous gardens on the corner of St Margaret's Road and Bowdon Road. It is within the Devisdale Conservation Area (the CA). The dwelling fronts St Margaret's Road and is well enclosed on both boundaries with the highway: a low stone wall and hedging to St Margaret's Road; and low stone wall and timber fencing to Bowdon Road.
5. The *Devisdale Conservation Area, Supplementary Planning Document, Conservation Area Appraisal* (2016) (SPD5.10) describes the significance of the CA as derived, in part, from the historic properties, the majority Victorian, of a variety of styles set on substantial plots, often to the back of the plot or off centre. It further describes that many of these properties have boundary treatments of low stone walls with planting above, which give the area a historic character. I observed on my site visit that such boundary treatment is a strong characteristic of St Margaret's Road with dwellings partly screened from view by mature trees and shrubs. Beechthorpe is identified as a 'Positive Contributor' to the CA, reflecting a substantial number of elements in the CA in age, style, materials and form. I find the low stone wall and mature planting along St Margaret's Road to form part of Beechthorpe's positive contribution.
6. The existing main access to Beechthorpe is located to the rear of the dwelling from Bowdon Road, at the eastern end of the plot. The proposal is for this access to be blocked off, and a new vehicular access created from St Margaret's Road following the removal of the existing boundary wall. New gates and gateposts are proposed, set back within the plot, as well as an area of gravel driveway to the front of the dwelling. This proposed removal of the historic low-level front wall, the re-positioning of a gate opening and the removal of part of the front garden to create additional hardstanding would be contrary to policies 31, 34 and 35 of the *Devisdale Conservation Area, Supplementary Planning Document, Conservation Management Plan* (2016) (SPD5.10a). Collectively, this guidance aims to preserve and enhance the significant low stone boundary walls and associated planting, characteristic of the CA.
7. However, although it would result in removal of a section of historic wall (of around 5m in width) on the St Margaret's Road frontage, the proposed new access had been designed so that it is splayed, with the stone wall material reused to construct a new section of wall up to the proposed gates set-back around 5m within the plot. The OS map regression submitted by the appellant shows that Beechthorpe is unusual in that it historically did not benefit from access from St Margaret's Road, and I saw on my site visit that most dwellings on St Margaret's Road have a similar access arrangement to the proposal before me. The new access would therefore assimilate well with this established historic character and the attractive linear views north and south along St Margaret's Road would not be substantively changed, notwithstanding the proximity of the proposed access to that of the neighbour, Highfield. The views would remain of the characteristic long boundary walls, broken in places, with mature, secluded gardens behind. There would therefore be no conflict with the aims of the SPD guidance.
8. The proposal would result in the removal of a Plum and Holly tree on the St Margaret's Road frontage; the latter being identified as Category B1 so of

moderate quality or value. Whilst I agree with the Council's Arboriculturist that the loss of these trees is regrettable, the location of the proposed access is such that the large Yew tree in the north-west corner of the plot and the group of Cypress trees and much of the boundary hedgerow on the frontage can be retained. Inevitably, the proposed new access would result in a greater visual appreciation of Beechthorpe, which is in itself not negative given the contribution the SPD recognises it makes (as a building) to the CA. There would also be an increase in the amount of hardstanding to the front of the dwelling, including the removal of the footway to Bowdon Road identified on the 1913 OS map. However, the retention of most of the mature landscape features on the frontage means the secluded and verdant character that contributes to the significance of the CA would nonetheless be preserved.

9. The design of the gate posts and gate is very similar to those of the neighbouring dwelling, Highfield. The gate posts would be around 2.1m in height constructed in stone and of relatively slender proportions, with black powder coated gates between. I do not find them to be unsympathetic in design and because they would be well set back from the pavement, they would not be particularly prominent in the streetscene, visible only in close proximity to Beechthorpe.
10. The significance of a CA is dependent on how it is experienced and proposals must be judged according to their effect on a CA as a whole, having at least a degree of prominence. For the reasons I have given, the proposal would not be unduly prominent and would not be detrimental to the character or appearance of the CA, preserving its significance. In reaching this conclusion, I have had regard to SPD5.10 and 10a and *Supplementary Planning Document SPD4: A Guide for Designing House Extensions and Alterations (2012)*. Consequently, the proposal would accord with policies R1 and L7 of the Trafford Local Plan: Core Strategy (2012) and the guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), in so far as they require development to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas, be of high quality and appropriate to its context.

Other Matters

11. I have had regard to the other matters raised by local residents and the Bowdon Conservation Group in respect of pedestrian safety and traffic disruption. I observed on my site visit that the existing access arrangement is constrained because of the narrow width of Bowdon Road and I have no evidence before me to disagree with the Local Highway Authority that the proposed new access from St Margaret's Road provides a betterment over this existing arrangement. The proposed gates would also be set back within the plot, such that a vehicle would be able to pull off the highway and pavement whilst waiting for the gates to open.

Conditions

12. The Council have suggested a number of conditions and I have considered these against the Framework and Planning Practice Guidance.
13. In addition to the standard time limit for implementation of the planning permission, it is necessary to specify the approved drawings in the interests of certainty. The proposed drawings show full details of the gate posts, gates, driveway and blocked off access (to Bowdon Road), including materials. I do

not therefore find it necessary or reasonable to require further details to be submitted and approved, as suggested by the Council.

14. Notwithstanding the loss of 2no. trees, I further do not find it necessary for a full soft landscaping scheme to be submitted for a householder proposal of this nature. However, in the interests of protecting the retained trees and preserving the character and appearance of the CA, I have imposed a condition requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with the Tree Protection Method Statement.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

R. Jones

INSPECTOR