



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 April 2023

by M Ollerenshaw BSc (Hons) MTPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 April 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/W/22/3292052

142 High Street, Lakenheath IP27 9EW

- 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 Michael O'Rourke against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
- The application Ref DC/21/2167/FUL, dated 27 October 2021, was refused by notice dated 20 January 2022.
- The development proposed is new dwelling following demolition of existing outbuildings.

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 area, including the Lakenheath Conservation Area and the host property, a non-designated heritage asset.

Reasons

3. The appeal site relates to an area of land to the rear of 142 High Street within the settlement boundary for Lakenheath. No 142 is a two storey end terraced property which fronts onto the south-western side of High Street. The host property has a long rear garden which includes several outbuildings and a garage. The site is bounded by the gardens of neighbouring properties on either side and to the rear.
4. The site and the host property are located within the Lakenheath Conservation Area (the CA). The significance of the CA derives predominantly from the numerous historic buildings many of which follow a linear pattern of development along High Street and display a vernacular style and the use of traditional walling and roofing materials.
5. The host property and one of the rear outbuildings are identified within the Conservation Area Appraisal as being of local interest. The Council and the appellant's Heritage Statement identify the property as a non-designated heritage asset. The simple vernacular style of the property reflects the character of the CA. The evidence before me indicates that the significance of the host property stems from its historic interest and aesthetic value. Thus, based on the evidence before me, I consider that the building is of sufficient historic interest to be considered a non-designated heritage asset.

6. To the north of the appeal site, the Lakenheath Hotel is a Grade II listed building. The Council raise no concerns in relation to the effect of the proposal on the setting of the listed building and I have no reason to find otherwise, particularly in view of the distance between the site and the listed building.
7. The overriding character of development on this stretch of High Street is that of two storey terraced properties following linear building lines with a road frontage and a strong street scene presence. Whilst not identified as open space to be retained, the long rear gardens of the properties and the existing trees and vegetation provide a verdant character and a sense of spaciousness.
8. Whilst there is some evidence to suggest that historically the rear garden of the host property was subdivided, as it now stands, both it and the long rear gardens of the terraced properties enable an understanding of the historic development of the area and contribute positively to the character of the area, including the CA. Although there are existing boundary fences between the gardens and a number of domestic outbuildings within the rear garden of the appeal site and neighbouring rear gardens, these are generally low-lying ancillary structures which do not significantly intrude into the setting of the CA.
9. The proposed dwelling would replace the existing outbuildings, including the garage. It would be a detached bungalow with a rectangular footprint, a gabled roof and accommodation within the roof space. Access to the site would be provided along the side of No 142 and off-road parking would be formed between the front of the proposed dwelling and the retained rear garden of the host property. A garden area would be situated to the side and rear of the proposed dwelling. The trees within the site would be removed but the established conifer hedge to the rear boundary would be retained.
10. Given its siting to the rear of properties on High Street, the proposal would not have a street presence in the way that the existing properties on High Street generally do. The proposal would therefore undermine the pattern of development and would erode one of the defining characteristics of this part of the CA. The harm arising from the siting of the proposed dwelling would be exacerbated by its relatively large footprint, the irregular shape of the proposed garden and reduction in size of the host property's rear garden, which not reflect the long linear gardens of existing properties on this stretch of High Street and diminish the verdant character to the rear of the host property, further emphasising the failure of the development to respect the prevailing pattern of development.
11. Given its proximity and position, the proposal would relate more closely to the host property than neighbouring development. There is some variety in the style of properties in the surrounding area. Whilst the proposal would include sympathetic detailing and external materials, the scale, height and form of the proposal would nevertheless contrast with the traditional appearance of the existing two storey properties fronting High Street, including the host property. These factors would exacerbate the dwelling's presence and its appearance as an incongruous addition. The appellant contends that the proposal would be of a simple linear form, akin to an outbuilding. However, it would be of a much greater scale and would represent an intrusion into the linear rear garden which contributes to the significance of the CA.
12. Despite its siting to the rear of the existing properties on High Street, the proposal would still be partially visible from the side access between Nos 142

and 144. From this vantage point, the development would appear as an intrusive and incongruous addition which would detract from the setting of the CA and the host property. Within its immediate setting and from neighbouring dwellings and their rear gardens, the adverse effect on the linear pattern of development, would be readily apparent. The removal of the garage would partly open up views down the site, but any enhancement in this respect would be very limited due to the presence of the proposed dwelling and the erection of a new brick wall across the site.

13. Residential development to the rear of some sections of High Street, including The Mallards and Pintail Close, are generally planned as more comprehensive developments in cul-de-sac arrangements rather than as backland development. New dwellings have been approved to the rear of the Lakenheath Hotel. The appellant contends that the proposal would be seen against a backdrop of that development and dwellings on Pintail Close. However, in the immediate context of the terrace of which the host property forms part, the erection of a new dwelling and subdivision of the plot would disrupt the linear form of the rear gardens which contribute to both the character of the CA, the host property and the wider terrace. For these reasons, the appeal scheme would not be comparable to these other developments because they have differing contexts. My attention is also drawn to an approved development at 84 High Street, but no substantive details have been provided. Accordingly, I cannot be sure it represents a direct parallel to the appeal proposal. In any case, I have determined the appeal on its own merits.
14. The proposal also includes an extended area of hardstanding to provide car parking for both the existing property and the new dwelling. This parking area would be concealed to the rear of the host property. In my view, the proposed access track, new passing bay and parking area would not have a significant impact on the character of the CA. The appellant argues that improving the parking arrangement to the existing property would enhance how No 142 is experienced as existing parking to the front and side of the property would be moved to the rear. Any enhancement in this respect is likely to be very limited as parking could still take place to the front of the host property, while parking to the side does not have a significant impact on the character of the area.
15. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, including the CA and the host property, a non-designated heritage asset. It would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the CA. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policy CS5 of the Forest Heath Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2010) and Policies DM2, DM16, DM17 and DM22 of the West Suffolk Joint Development Management Policies Document (2015). Amongst other matters, these policies seek to prevent development which does not enhance or maintain the character of the area, including conservation areas and local heritage assets and their settings. The proposal would also conflict with the aims of the Framework to ensure that development is sympathetic to local character and history and conserves and enhances the historic environment.
16. When considered in light of the designated heritage asset as a whole, the proposal would amount to less than substantial harm to the character and appearance of the CA. However, paragraph 199 of the Framework requires great weight to be attributed to harm regardless of the level of harm identified. Paragraph 202 of the Framework states that less than substantial harm to the

significance of a designated heritage asset should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposed development.

17. The proposal would contribute to the Council's housing supply. It would also have economic benefits through employment creation during the construction phase, Council tax revenue and spending in the local area by future occupants. The submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal refers to ecological enhancements on the site. Given the scale of the development, I give these matters limited weight in its favour. Although removal of the existing outbuildings and replacement of existing boundary treatments with more traditional materials may provide some benefit to the area's character and appearance, this would not outweigh the overall harm to the character of the CA arising from the proposal which would fail to relate well to the surrounding area. I conclude that the public benefits of the scheme do not outweigh the less than substantial harm. The identified harm therefore results in conflict with the development plan that is not outweighed by other material considerations.

Other Matters

18. I note the other concerns raised by interested parties relating to neighbouring occupiers' living conditions, wildlife and access for emergency services. As I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons there is no need for me to consider these matters further.

Conclusion

19. For the above reasons, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework, and all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

M Ollerenshaw

INSPECTOR