The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 November 2023

by J Bell-Williamson MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 December 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/D/23/3327351
Choodles, Melford Road, Cavendish, Suffolk CO10 8AA

- 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 Philip Vatter against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
- The application Ref DC/23/0634/HH, dated 20 April 2023, was refused by notice dated 22 June 2023.
- The development proposed is 1.8-metre-high front boundary fence.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The original description of development is provided in a more succinct form in the Council's decision notice. Therefore, the above description reflects the description shown on the decision notice.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed boundary fence on the character and appearance of the street scene.

Reasons

4. The appeal property is a detached bungalow in a residential area of mixed property types, including bungalows, chalet bungalows and two storey dwellings. The proposal involves replacing the existing planted hedge to the front boundary with a 1.8-metre-high fence that would span around eight metres in length. Willow fence panels would be used with brown concrete posts and gravel boards.

5. Policy DM2 of the Council's Joint Development Management Policies Document (2015) concerns development principles and local distinctiveness and includes the requirement that development should maintain or create a sense of place and/or local character. Policy DM24 of the same document requires alterations to dwellings and development within their curtilage to respect the character, scale and design of existing dwellings, and the character and appearance of the immediate and surrounding area.

6. Despite the presence of the A1092 road and the extent of built development, the character and appearance of the area is pleasant and verdant. This is due to the grass verges and spaces to the front of properties and the extent of planting and tree cover. Front boundary treatments to residential properties make a significant contribution in this regard as all the dwellings visible within the street scene surrounding the appeal property have hedges, other planting or open front boundaries. As such, this softens the built environment and hard infrastructure, and provides a good degree of visual uniformity.

7. The largest part of the proposed fence, the panels, would be natural in appearance and I note that the appellant intends to provide planting to the front to soften the appearance. As such, I acknowledge that the proposal has been designed to reflect as far as possible the verdant setting. However, given the strong degree of uniformity as described, the fence would appear as an uncharacteristic feature. In particular, it is not clear that planting would sufficiently screen the concrete posts and gravel board, which despite their colour, would appear particularly incongruous against the natural boundary treatments of neighbouring properties.

8. I have had regard to the other examples of properties referred to by the appellant. While the neighbouring dwelling, 'Studland', may be larger than its immediate neighbours, with a paved driveway, it has a planted front boundary, which is characteristic of the area. 'Fair View' may have a hedge that is taller than most in the area, but it is a natural feature, which unlike a fence, can be reduced in height. The property on Claunie Orchard may have a front boundary wall, but this is not a good precedent for changes that detract from the predominant character and appearance of the area.

9. Accordingly, for the reasons given, I conclude that the proposed boundary fence would have an unacceptably harmful effect on the character and appearance of the street scene. As such, it is contrary to Policies DM2 and DM24 of the Joint Development Management Policies Document, described above. It is also contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, which promotes good design.

Conclusion

10. For the reasons given it is concluded that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Bell-Williamson
INSPECTOR