



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 January 2024

by A Owen MA BA(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16th February 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Q4625/W/23/3321206

Strawberry Bank Hotel & Restaurant, 72 Main Road, Meriden CV7 7NF

- 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 Paul Owens of Westbourne Leisure Ltd against the decision of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PL/2020/01407/PPFL, dated 1 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 10 November 2022.
 - The development proposed is erection of 26-bedroom guest accommodation block to the rear of the Strawberry Bank Hotel.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The development originally comprised a 30-bedroom guest accommodation block. However this was amended to 26 bedrooms during the Council's determination of the application.
3. The Council's third reason for refusal related to surface water drainage. However, following clarification of the drainage arrangements for the development, the Lead Local Flood Authority have confirmed that they are satisfied that their initial concerns can be addressed by a planning condition. The Council therefore have withdrawn this reason for refusal.

Main Issues

4. In light of the above, the remaining main issues are the effects of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area including the setting of the listed building, and on highway safety.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The Strawberry Bank Hotel & Restaurant comprises a two storey building which has been subject of numerous extensions. The largest extension accommodates the hotel rooms and projects out towards the rear of the site in a linear form from the north west side of the main building.
 6. Most of the land in front of the buildings is used for car parking, with the part of the site enclosed by the buildings being used as garden. In its wider context it is flanked to both sides by residential development, and to the rear there are agricultural fields crossed by some public footpaths.
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7. There is a clear visual distinction between the older parts of the building and the newer extensions. This is most evident in the colour of the brickwork, which is painted lilac on the older parts of the building and is unpainted redbrick on the modern extensions. There is also a clear distinction in the scale; with the original building having a full two storeys with a pitched roof above, while the extensions have their first floor within their roof and which is served by numerous full dormer windows. This assists in the more modern extensions appearing subordinate to the original building and is a strong characteristic.
8. The proposed development would be detached from the main building. It would be comparable in footprint to the linear hotel extension, and of a similar design. However, whereas that existing block exclusively has full dormers with the eaves line below, the proposed block would have half dormers towards its rear end. This would mean the proposal would appear taller than the existing extension, particularly when viewed from the public footpaths to the rear above the low boundary hedge. I note the roof on the rear elevation of the existing extension is not fully hipped, as shown on the drawings, but this elevation does not appear as bulky as the corresponding rear elevation on the extension would, which would be a full two storey end wall with eaves and roof above. Furthermore, the two-storey part of the original building would not be clearly visible from this direction so the proposal would not be able to benefit from reflecting that form. It hence would appear as an incongruously large addition which would fail to respond appropriately to its context including the other extensions at the site.
9. The building is Grade II listed. Its main significance lies in its appearance in the street scene as an attractive and historic building. Both parties refer to its front and east side elevations, which are the most visible in the street scene and are generally unaltered, as its best features. Indeed, the listing entry refers largely to features on these elevations. The other two elevations are where the extensions have generally been added and the Council state that these interfere to a lesser degree with the significance of the building. It is therefore the space in front of these two prominent elevations, as well as the street scene, that contribute strongly to the building's setting and consequently its significance.
10. From the front of the site, the proposal would be largely hidden behind tall and mature trees and bushes and a timber smoking shelter. It is also sited on slightly lower ground than the main part of the building. As such it would not be readily visible from the road and so not seen in the same context as the listed building.
11. As set out above, the proposal would be clearly visible from the public footpaths behind the site, but from here the views of the original building are largely obscured by the conservatory style dining area extension with only the top of the roof and its chimneys visible. As such the development would have no harmful effect on the views of the listed building from here.
12. The appellant's heritage assessment shows the original building, Strawberry Bank House, being set in extensive grounds. However due to the size of the extensions that have already taken place and the extensive car park, much of these gardens have already been lost. The detached accommodation block would reduce the openness of the garden, but it would allow a good proportion

of the garden to be retained. Moreover, it would have no impact on the extent of the curtilage. As a result, in all respects, the development would not harm the setting of the listed building and therefore would preserve its significance.

13. In summary, whilst the proposal would not cause harm to the setting of the listed building, it would harm the character and appearance of the area when seen from the rear. As such it would fail to accord with policy P15 of the Solihull Local Plan (2013) (the 'Local Plan') and policy BE1 of the Meriden Neighbourhood Plan which together expect development to conserve local character and respect the scale, massing and building style of the surrounding built environment. There would, however, be no conflict with Local Plan policy P16 which seeks to ensure development preserves heritage assets.

Highway safety

14. The hotel currently has 69 rooms in addition to the restaurant and pub. The proposal would increase the accommodation at the site to 95 rooms. I understand the Council's Vehicle Parking Standards and Green Travel Plans Supplementary Planning Document (the 'SPD') states there should be a maximum of 1 parking space per room. It is stated that there are 119 car parking spaces at present and it is not proposed to increase this provision. In effect therefore, the parking provision for the pub and restaurant would be reduced to 24 spaces.
15. I am also advised that, in accordance with the SPD, 24 parking spaces would be sufficient to serve 96 customers at the pub and restaurant. However I have no details of the capacity of the pub and restaurant, including the area within the conservatory style extension which is not shown on the floor plans. I cannot be satisfied therefore that the amount of parking would be sufficient.
16. It is recognised that the parking standards are maximums, and so technically the parking provision would meet them. Nonetheless, it would still be important to provide sufficient parking so as to prevent indiscriminate overspill parking on surrounding residential streets which could compromise highway safety.
17. The appellant suggests that when the venue is hosting an event, such as a wedding, and all 95 rooms were occupied simultaneously, it would be unlikely that the restaurant and pub would be able to operate to its fullest. I agree. However, clearly, guests at the hotel may not always be attending events at the site. It is not unreasonable to consider that there could be times when the restaurant and pub are busy, and the hotel is being used extensively by visitors attending events elsewhere, such as the NEC.
18. I acknowledge the offer of overspill parking in the Pertemps car park, which is a short distance away. However visitors may prefer to park in closer residential streets opposite or to the west, rather than in a car park accessible via an unlit access road, overshadowed by trees preventing any passive surveillance, particularly if attending an event that goes on after dark.
19. Overall, I am not satisfied that the parking provision would be sufficient to serve the development.
20. In terms of trip generation, the appellant states that the hotel operates atypically due to its position close to Birmingham Airport and the NEC and because visitors attending events on site tend to arrive and depart throughout the day. Hence, the usual peaks most hotels experience at check in and check

out times do not happen here. Moreover, they suggest that the development would reduce vehicle trips as it would allow visitors of events at the site to remain at the hotel overnight, instead of leaving to stay at alternative accommodation.

21. I consider that maintaining the current capacity of the function room whilst increasing the level of accommodation would be likely to eliminate some of the car trips of visitors leaving at the end of events. However, as set out above, it is not unreasonable to consider that if there are not events at the venue and the hotel is accommodated mostly by visitors attending events elsewhere, there could be an increase in vehicle movements commensurate with the increase in hotel rooms.
22. Nonetheless, I would consider it unlikely that the vehicle movements generated by a further 26 rooms would have a harmful effect on the local road network. Main Road is one of the major roads through Meriden and so already accommodates a considerable volume of traffic. A one-way system operates across the front of the site, visibility from the exit is good and there is a dedicated lane for vehicles turning right into the access. I see no reason therefore why additional traffic generated from the development would have an unacceptable impact on the local road network such that highway safety would be compromised. This does not however, mitigate the harm that could be caused by indiscriminate overspill parking.
23. Consequently, the proposal would fail to accord with Local Plan policy P8 which says that development should not result in a reduction in safety for any road users.

Other Matters

24. The proposal would provide an economic benefit to the business and to the wider community. Yet there is no suggestion that the development is necessary to sustain the business or the listed building.
25. It is also acknowledged that there may be some environmental benefits through tree planting and the provision of bird boxes. But this would be modest, particularly in light of the tree removal that would occur.
26. The tree removal itself would most likely allow more light into the adjacent residential gardens, and the building may provide a more effective acoustic barrier to those properties. However there are other, less harmful, ways to achieve these aims.

Conclusion

27. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations that indicate a decision other than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore the appeal is dismissed.

A Owen

INSPECTOR