

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 May 2024

by Martin Andrews MA(Planning) BSc(Econ) DipTP & DipTP(Dist) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 June 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/R5510/W/23/3331632

12-14 Poplars Close, Ruislip, Hillingdon HA4 7BU

- 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 EHE Ltd against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hillingdon.
 - The application, Ref. 51198/APP/2023/1897, dated 28 June 2023 was refused by notice dated 11 September 2023.
 - The development proposed is the redevelopment of Nos. 12 and 14 Poplars Close to provide 4 residential units.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are (i) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the Ruislip Village Conservation Area, and (ii) the living conditions for neighbouring occupiers in terms of outlook, privacy and light and for future occupiers of the development as regards outlook, privacy, noise & disturbance and amenity space. In my appraisal I have had regard to the submissions of not only the appellant and the Council but also to third parties responding to the public consultation.

Reasons

Issue (i): Effect on the Character and Appearance of the Conservation Area

3. It was clear from my visit that the existing pair of bungalows are on a highly constrained site with an unorthodox and essentially backland position to the rear of large buildings in the High Street and some distance from the street scene of Poplars Close. The dwellings are a matching pair of very limited design merit and with the narrow width of each plot and separated by a minimal distance they amount to a congested development of the site.
 4. With that said, the bungalows are at present relatively unobtrusive due to a combination of their single-storey form; their separation from the public realm of Poplars Close; a backdrop of the much taller and bulkier rear elevations of the High Street buildings, and from mainly being seen in the public domain across the grassed area of Woodford Hall (there are more limited views at close quarters from the footpath linking the Close to the High Street and from a security gate at the end of Princess Lane).
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5. The appeal scheme proposes to double the number of residential units from two single dwellings to four flats. And despite the relatively discreet siting, I consider the intensification of built form and use of the land would inevitably have potential implications for a site with significant constraints of both size and location.
6. As regards the specific impact on the conservation area, the appeal scheme would perpetuate and exacerbate the existing congested development by the inclusion of building upwards on the two separate buildings. And although the existing bungalows are to be vertically extended, the minimal distance between the buildings would remain. However, because of the increased height and 5 metres greater length, the narrowness of the gap would be a particularly negative feature in visual terms.
7. More significantly in regard to the effect on the wider townscape of Ruislip Village, with their increased height (perceived as two-storey rather than the 1.5 storeys of a building with rooms in the roof) the buildings would result in a much more conspicuous development, thereby giving further emphasis to the somewhat incongruous location. I have noted the character appraisal of the conservation area, but rather than consistency with the more pleasing features of its 'character area', the appeal site is more characteristic of a transitional location between the residential suburbs and the commercial buildings of the High Street.
8. Nonetheless, the pair of proposed buildings at or close to two-storey height and separated by a minimal gap would to all intents and purposes be read as a single building mass. As such, it would draw the eye and be seen as an over-development of too small a site, out of keeping with the more spacious layout of Poplars Close and visually intrusive in the aforementioned aspects from the entrance to Woodlands Hall and the footpath to the High Street. The Council has also raised a valid point in respect of inappropriate external materials in this particular context. Because of a combination of these factors, the appeal scheme would in my view fail to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area.
9. This adverse effect would be in harmful conflict with Policies BE1 & HE1 of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part One – Strategic Policies 2012; Policies DMHB1, DMHB4, DMHB11, DMHB12 & DMHD1 of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part Two – Development Management Policies 2020, and Policies D3, D4 & HC1 of the London Plan 2021. The development would also be contrary to Section 16: 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment' of Government policy in the National Planning Policy Framework December 2023 ('the Framework').
10. Although the development would harmfully conflict with local policies and the Framework, there would be '*less than substantial harm*' to the significance of the conservation area as a designated heritage asset. As required by paragraph 208 of the Framework, I have therefore weighed this harm against the public benefits of the proposal. These are in the form of two additional dwellings which would make a useful and worthwhile incremental contribution to housing supply in the Borough, notwithstanding that the Council can demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites. However, on balance I consider that this advantage would be clearly outweighed by the harm caused to the character

and appearance of the conservation area and the resultant conflict with both local and national policy on planning and heritage matters.

Issue (ii): Effect on Living Conditions

11. On this issue, the Council has expressed its concerns as regards the effect of the development on the living conditions both for existing neighbours at Nos. 8 & 10 Poplars Close on the opposite side of the footpath and for users of the open space associated with Woodford Hall (primarily the Day Necessary). The scheme is also considered to provide a good standard of living conditions for its future residents. The specifics of the alleged harms caused are briefly summarised in paragraph 2 above.
12. Bearing in mind my above comments in respect of the first issue and a conclusion that the site is clearly too small for the development proposed, it is perhaps inevitable that there would also be shortcomings in several aspects that affect day to day living for both the neighbours and the future occupiers, especially the latter. I have noted the appellant's individual comments on the Council's appraisal, and I acknowledge that in some instances they make some helpful corrections and clarifications. Nonetheless, I consider that most of the Council's objections remain valid.
13. Overall, on this issue, I find that a sufficient case has been made by the Council for a refusal of permission based on a factual interpretation of the submitted plans and the details they include which affect the living standards of future occupiers and neighbours. The resultant policy conflicts are set out in the Notice of Refusal.
14. However, even if I had concluded in the appellant's favour on each and every aspect of the living conditions, this would amount to no less and no more than my agreement that the minimum reasonable expectations in the Council's policies and guidance had been met by the proposed development. Accordingly, such a finding would be 'neutral' and cannot therefore be a positive outcome for the appellant of sufficient weight to overcome my conclusion on the first issue. This is that the proposed development would be unacceptable because it would be harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons explained and having had regard to all other matters raised the appeal is dismissed.

Martin Andrews

INSPECTOR