



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 June 2024

by E Dade BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12th July 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Q0505/W/23/3323216

37 Natal Road, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire CB1 3NS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs Reilly against the decision of Cambridge City Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/00804/FUL.
 - The development proposed is erection of 5No. dwellings following demolition of existing bungalow.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area;
 - Whether the proposed development would provide adequate living conditions, with particular regard to external private amenity space; and
 - The effect of the proposed development on highway safety.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal site comprises a modest mid-20th century bungalow which faces Natal Road and is set back from pavement edge by a front garden and driveway. The rear garden runs parallel to Perne Road, enclosed by a close boarded fence and hedge with a gated vehicular access at its end.
4. Natal Road is a narrow residential street. The appeal property is at the end of a row of bungalows of similar age and appearance. On the opposite side of Natal Road are two-storey semi-detached dwellings with prominent bay windows, and short front gardens. Perne Road provides a main route with busy traffic, wide pedestrian footways, cycle paths, and occasional grass verges and street trees. Dwellings are generally set back behind tall boundary treatments.
5. Natal Road and Perne Road are predominantly residential in use with a mixed architectural character and differing size and scale of buildings. The character of Perne Road is strongly influenced by its highway infrastructure. However, the area generally has a suburban character.

6. The proposed development would comprise a terrace of five dwellings and therefore would represent a significant increase the built form on the site. The terrace would be set in from its boundaries by its small gardens and a row of car parking spaces. However, the proposed development's footprint would occupy a significant portion of the site area, resulting in built development across the majority of the length of the site. The proposed development would therefore appear cramped within the site.
7. The dwellings at plots 1 and 5 would be two-storey with front gables. Whilst the mid-terrace dwellings are described as being of 1.5 storeys with front dormers, the roof ridge would be of continuous height across the terrace. Therefore, the proposed development would appear substantial in scale and bulk and would appear excessive and unsympathetic within the context of existing dwellings, including the bungalows and modest semi-detached dwellings at Natal Road.
8. Views of the proposed development would be partially obscured by the tall close boarded fence and hedge. However, the scale and bulk of the development would still be readily apparent in the street scene above the height of boundary treatments, which would therefore be insufficient to mitigate the visual impacts of the development.
9. The proposed development would intensify the use of the site from one to five dwellings and would significantly alter the site's low-density character. Whilst a two-storey block of flats, no 31 Brookfields, is near the site, this occupies a more urban context. The development's high-density form would be prominent in the street scene, where the dwelling entrances would be visible, and would appear out of keeping with the area's suburban character.
10. The scale and design of the proposed dwellings has sought to reflect no 202 Perne Road, an L-shaped dwelling with a hipped roof and pitched roof volume connected via a lower linking section. The massing provides variation in the roof line and reduces its bulk. Conversely, the proposed development would comprise multiple dwellings. It would be significantly taller than no 202, would be of uniform height, and substantially larger in scale, bulk, and mass. The proposed development therefore materially differs in design to no 202.
11. The appellant has drawn my attention to other consented schemes in the area. The development approved at the rear of nos 40 and 42 Natal Road comprises two-storey dwellings of smaller scale than the dwellings proposed and replaces an existing garage with a frontage to Perne Road. The two dwellings approved at no 200 Perne Road replace an existing bungalow and occupy broadly the same footprint. The other recent approved developments in the area differ considerably from the appeal proposal in their context, circumstances, and design, and therefore do not justify the proposed development.
12. As set out above, through its substantial scale and bulk, the proposed development would appear cramped and unsympathetic to surrounding dwellings. The proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area.
13. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policy 52 of the Cambridge Local Plan 2018 (LP) which supports development of garden land and the subdivision of existing dwelling plots where the form, height and layout of the proposed development is appropriate to the surrounding pattern of development and the character of the area. In addition, the proposal would conflict with LP Policies

55, 56 and 57 which together require development be designed to be attractive, have a positive impact on their setting, responding to its context and drawing inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings, using appropriate local characteristics to help inform the use, siting, massing, scale, form, materials and landscape design of new development.

14. The proposal would be contrary to paragraph 135 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which requires development be sympathetic to local character and history.

Living conditions

15. Each proposed dwelling would have a front garden and private rear garden. LP Policy 50 sets out standards for external space for residential units but does not prescribe minimum sizes. Rather, the supporting text lists functions and domestic items which the external amenity space should accommodate.
16. The proposed units would be one-bedroom dwellings and the supporting text states dwellings of this scale are not expected to provide space for children to play. Cycle and bin storage would be accommodated in the front garden.
17. The rear gardens would be small, particularly at plots 1 to 4. The appellant asserts the rear gardens would provide space for a table and chairs and to dry washing. However, the proposal does not demonstrate a shed for general storage along with adequate circulation space could be accommodated. Therefore, the proposal fails to demonstrate the external amenity space would be of appropriate size to meet the needs of future occupants.
18. The plots would be enclosed by tall, close boarded fences. Existing brick outbuildings with pitched roofs abut the boundary of the rear gardens of plots 2, 3 and 4. In addition, the two-storey gable end of no 31 would adjoin the side boundary of plot 5's rear garden. Consequently, through a strong sense of enclosure, users of the rear gardens would experience poor outlook.
19. Due to their orientation and close proximity to surrounding built form, the rear gardens would be overshadowed for the majority of the day. Low levels of daylight and sunlight would fail to promote effective and practical use of the space by residents. Whilst the appellant asserts the rear amenity spaces could form attractive courtyard gardens that would benefit from sunlight for most the day, no assessment of daylight and sunlight has been provided. Due to their small size, the front garden would be of limited practical use and therefore would not compensate for the inadequate rear gardens.
20. For these reasons, the proposal fails to demonstrate that suitable external private amenity space would be provided. Therefore, the proposal would not provide adequate living conditions for future occupants.
21. The proposal would conflict with LP Policy 50 which requires all new residential units have direct access to an area of private amenity space of a shape, size, and location to allow effective and practical use of the space by residents. In addition, the proposal would not satisfy paragraph 135 of the Framework which requires development create a high standard of amenity for future users.

Highway safety

22. The local highway authority (LHA) objected to the scheme due to inadequate visibility from the vehicular access from plot 5 and the inability to leave the plot in a forward gear. However, a revised proposed site plan was submitted prior to the Council's decision and removes the vehicular access to Perne Road and omits the parking space at plot 5. Since no vehicles would be able to access the plot, the revised plan would overcome the LHA's objection.
23. LP Policy 82 requires new development not exceed its car parking standards, taking into account the accessibility of the site to public transport and the nature of the use. The parking standards require the development provide one visitor space and no more than a mean of 1.5 spaces per dwelling. The proposal would provide four off-street parking spaces and therefore would not breach the standard. The proposed development would include cycle storage and would be served by a pedestrian footway, cycle infrastructure, and public transport via nearby bus stops. The site is therefore in an accessible location and I am satisfied the quantum of parking provision would be suitable.
24. Some residents raised concerns regarding the effects of the proposal on on-street parking. However, the LHA advises no significant adverse impact upon highway safety would arise in this regard, and I have been provided no evidence to suggest conflict with the development plan.
25. Consequently, I am satisfied the LHA's concerns have been suitably addressed, and the proposal would not harm highway safety. Therefore, the proposal would comply with LP Policies 80 and 81 which supports development where they do not have an unacceptable transport impact.
26. In addition, the proposal would satisfy paragraph 115 of the Framework which states development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Other Matters

27. The Council is able to demonstrate an adequate supply of housing and therefore the proposed development's contribution to the supply of dwellings carries only modest weight in favour of the development.

Conclusion

28. Whilst I have identified no significant adverse impacts in respect of highway safety, the proposal would harm character and appearance and fail to provide suitable living conditions for future occupants.
29. The proposal would therefore conflict with the development plan taken as a whole and there are no other considerations which outweigh this finding. For the reasons given the appeal should be dismissed.

E Dade

INSPECTOR