



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 September 2024

by C Shearing BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 October 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/D3640/W/23/3335977

Pinecroft, Ravenswood Drive, Camberley, Surrey GU15 2BU

- 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 M Ross against the decision of Surrey Heath Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/0447/FFU.
 - The development proposed is described as 'erection of a dwelling within the garden of 'Pinecroft' with a detached car port. New access and entrance gates.'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. On 30 July 2024 the Government published a consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and other changes to the planning system. Whilst a direction of travel has been outlined within the Written Ministerial Statement, which is a material consideration, the changes to the Framework can only be given limited weight at this stage, given that no final document has been published. In any event, the policies that are material to this decision are not subject to any fundamental changes, and I am satisfied that this has not prejudiced any party. Consequently, in reaching my decision I have had regard to the Framework published in December 2023.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The Council's Western Urban Area Character Supplementary Planning Document 2012 (the WUAC) describes the area's character and assists in defining the key features which contribute to it. The appeal site lies within the Wooded Hills Housing Character Area, which the WUAC describes as being characterised by large irregular plots, winding roads and lanes, as well as heavy vegetation, which give the area a semi-rural character. It also describes, among other attributes, that buildings are spaciouly set with separation between buildings to the front, side and rear. It goes on to comment that on many sites, the separation created by side gardens is extremely generous, and that one of the pressures on this character area is the progressive loss of the large irregular plots as they are subdivided.

5. While the WUAC describes the area as comprising pockets, it does so in the context of 20th century subdivisions which created housing estates which are different to the areas surrounding them. Ravenswood Drive does, however, have some characteristics which differ from the surrounding area. In particular, it is a narrow road without footpaths, and is heavily enclosed by tall, often verdant, boundary treatments. Properties on the southern side of Ravenswood Drive and to the west of Pinecroft are set within irregular plots with generous spaces around them, and these generally demonstrate those characteristics described by the WUAC. By contrast, to the east of the appeal site the houses have more regular and rectangular plot shapes, are set parallel to the road and occupy much of the plot widths. The Council note that the two more modern houses to the east pre-date the adoption of the WUAC and, based on the evidence, these entailed the subdivision of a plot similar to Pinewood between 1999 and 2005, in a manner which the SPD now acknowledges as one of the pressures on local character. The Inspector in the earlier appeal¹ commented that wider, irregular shaped plots predominate on Ravenswood Drive, and I have no reason to reach a different view.
6. The scale of Pinecroft's plot, together with the position and angled orientation of the house, which addresses the plot, reflect those attributes which are described by the WUAC as being defining features of the area. As such, the site is one which contributes positively to the character of the area. The site has now been subdivided by domestic fencing, but continues to contain some paraphernalia typical of a garden setting. Together with the absence of development on the site, this has not significantly diminished the contribution that the site makes to the spacious and semi-rural character of the area.
7. The proposal would substantially reduce the generous plot of Pinecroft and entirely remove its side garden. In turn, the proposal would erode the area's defining character. The repositioned and angled boundary line between the two properties would give some irregularity to the two resulting plot shapes, however, this would be very minor and the two properties would be close to the site boundaries and the plots would adopt a more rectangular form. The houses would occupy much of their plot widths and this would be apparent in glimpses of the buildings from the road, including their roof forms. This would give a more cramped appearance to the two plots than is characteristic of the area, and be accentuated by the location and scale of the proposed car port.
8. The proposal would entail a 5m wide access from the road and the appellant has now removed part of the hedgerow which allows views from the road into the open appeal site. The proposed gates are shown to be solid and the proposed site layout and planting scheme would result in any views from the new access being predominantly of the driveway and planting with a backdrop of trees behind, rather than giving stark views of the new house. This would assist in respecting the verdant character of the area. Nonetheless, it would remain the case that the subdivision of the plot would be apparent through the increase in built form and formation of a new formal access. Although I accept these effects would be limited to very localised views, there would nonetheless be some harm to the character of the area.
9. It is not disputed that the resultant site density and plot ratios would adhere to those set out in the WUAC. However, these are set among other principles

¹ APP/D3640/W/21/3286415 – 29 November 2022

and the Framework establishes that development should make efficient use of land while also taking into account the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting including residential gardens.

10. For the reasons given, the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would conflict with Policy DM9 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document 2012 which requires, among other things, that development respects and enhances the local character of the environment, and expects development to reflect design and character measures set out in either general or area specific SPD. There would also be conflict with the Framework where it requires development to be sympathetic to local character including the surrounding built environment.
11. The proposal would also be at odds with the Council's Residential Design Guide 2017, insofar as it states that new development should reflect the spacing of existing buildings. It would also conflict with the WUAC discussed above, in particular its guiding principles relating to the Wooded Hills Character Area, including that new development should have regard to being in spacious plots which provide for extensive space between and around buildings, and that development forms that are contrary to the prevailing character of detached houses set in generous individual enclosed plots with large side gardens will be resisted.

Other Matters

12. The Council's second reason for refusal relates to the effects of the proposal on the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA), of which the appeal site is within the zone of influence. However, Regulation 63(1) of the Habitats Regulations² indicates the requirement for an Appropriate Assessment is only necessary where the competent authority is minded to give consent for the proposal. As the appeal is being dismissed on other grounds it is not therefore necessary to address this in any further detail.
13. It is not disputed by the appellant that the Council are able to demonstrate in excess of a five year land supply for housing. Consequently, and based on the evidence, the provisions of paragraph 11d) of the Framework do not apply to the appeal. The proposal does not therefore benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the Framework.
14. The proposal would nonetheless make a contribution to the Borough's housing stock and would contribute towards the national objective to boost the supply of homes. The new house would be in an established built up area with good accessibility to services and facilities including public transport, and there would be some economic benefits arising from the construction process and ongoing expenditure into the local economy by future occupants. However, as the proposal would provide only one dwelling, the weight of these benefits together would be limited, and would not outweigh the harm identified.

Conclusion

15. The proposal would conflict with the development plan and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which outweigh this finding. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

² The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

C Shearing

INSPECTOR