

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 September 2024

by P Eggleton BSc(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 October 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/W/24/3341389

Standelfield, Standhill Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9AE

- 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 T Jensen & Ms J Tubby against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application reference is 23/00887/FP.
 - The development proposed is two detached four-bedroom dwellings together with associated vehicular access and car parking, private gardens, hard and soft landscaping, and private footpaths; and alterations to the existing dwelling including works to the existing two-storey bay window on the south-east facing elevation and the insertion of new windows to the south-west and north-east facing elevations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

3. The proposal would result in two new dwellings within the large garden of Standelfield. This assessment is based on the plans before the council when the decision was made including those submitted on 4 December 2023. Although alterations to the existing dwelling are proposed, the council's concerns relate only to the new dwellings. Although there are heritage assets in the vicinity, such as the conservation area and a converted chapel, the proposal would not harm the setting of either.
 4. From its junction with Park Street, Standhill Road is dominated by the presence of mature landscaping to both sides of the road as it rises and curves up the hill. This dense woodland character is punctuated by the two modern properties on the right but given their set back from the road they are not dominant in longer views. Standelfield and the properties to its west, are set behind mature woodland and are not experienced until arriving at the narrow driveway that serves them and forms part of the application site.
 5. Although it is evident that trees have been removed, the vegetation within the garden of Standelfield continues to screen the house, despite its raised position. There are gaps in this screening which allow clearer, shorter range
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views but these gaps are not evident in longer views along the road. The woodland character, generally devoid of evident development on both sides of the road, continues until Sandy Grove which provides the second access to Standelfield.

6. When travelling from the cemetery towards Park Street, Standelfield is evident in views between trees, despite its set back and mature landscaped garden. Given the evidence of the number of removed trees, it is likely that the house now has an increased prominence, although its position and retained screening ensure that it is not dominant. Overall, the lower section of Standhill Road retains a predominantly woodland character. The lack of prominent development to either side, notwithstanding the two houses to the west, adds significantly to its character and appearance.
7. The plans have been amended with the proposed houses reduced in size. The layout has been modified to limit the incursion of development into the retained tree canopies and the staggered ground floor and proposed construction methods seek to avoid damage within root protection areas. The materials proposed have been chosen to help assimilate the structures into their setting and low level planting would offer improved screening of the development over time. However, despite these efforts and especially in the short to medium term, these new structures would be extremely dominant and prominent when approaching in both directions along Standhill Road.
8. The upper element, particularly the south facing elevation, would be close to the pavement, particularly for the northern dwelling. This two storey element would be particularly imposing given its form and proximity to the boundary. The large glazed side windows would also be extremely intrusive, particularly at night, despite the retained and proposed landscaping. The dwellings would be overly dominant given their limited set back into the site. Their orientation would add to the mass of development experienced. They would entirely change the character and appearance of this area to its detriment.
9. The proposed design and materials could be well suited to a woodland setting if the woodland and landscaping remained significantly more prominent with the dwellings appearing recessive within such a setting. However, this would not be the case given their scale and proximity to the boundary. They would represent strident new features that, rather than sitting within the landscape setting and complimenting it, would dominate and detract from it. The scale and design of these houses would be out of place and they would be overly dominant in the positions shown. The proposal would therefore represent poor design in this particular context. It would be contrary to policies SP9 and D1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031 (2022) as it would not be designed and located in a way that would respond positively to its local context. The *National Planning Policy Framework 2023* is clear that development that is not well designed should be refused.
10. The above assessment is based on the assumption that the measures put forward to protect the health of the remaining trees would be successful and that future management requirements would not significantly alter what is currently proposed. The revised Arboricultural impacts assessment is not entirely persuasive in this regard. In any event however, even with the success of management measures proposed and positive future landscaping, the

development would remain unacceptably harmful due to its scale and proximity to Standhill Road.

11. It has been shown that the proposal would result in an increase in biodiversity and subject to conditions, I have no reason to consider that this would not be achieved. The design would also include significant measures with regard to sustainable construction; energy generation; water and thermal efficiency. These matters add to the economic and social benefits that would result from the building and occupation of two high quality houses. The proposal would also make a more efficient use of land in this relatively accessible location. These matters provide considerable weight in favour of the proposal.
12. The council are unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of land for housing. Paragraph 11d of the *Framework* advises that planning permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the *Framework* taken as a whole.
13. Although there are clearly benefits to the proposal, which can be afforded greater weight given the local housing supply position, the development would result in considerable harm to the character and appearance of this area and it would represent poor design in this particular context. I conclude that even on the basis of a positive view with regard to the future health and retention of trees and the development of the landscaping, the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the *Framework* taken as a whole. I therefore dismiss the appeal.

Peter Eggleton

INSPECTOR