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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 October 2024

**by N Praine BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 02 DECEMBER 2024**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/R3650/W/24/3348865**

**1 Shackstead Lane, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1RL**

- 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 M Correia against the decision of Waverley Borough Council.
  - The application Ref is WA/2024/00029.
  - The development proposed is described as the erection of first floor extension and alterations.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal lies within the Ockford Road Conservation Area ("the CA"). Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on decision makers with respect to any buildings or land within a Conservation Area, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

### Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposed development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area including the CA.

### Reasons

4. The significance of this part of the CA is defined, in part, by its evidence of the historic development of Godalming which in part developed linearly along Ockford Road as Godalming extended out along the well trafficked main access routes. The buildings within the CA, while varied in places, illustrate the changing perceptions of this area as a location for housing, including densely built cottages of the 17th century to larger more prestigious homes over the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The presence of these buildings makes a positive contribution to the distinctiveness, interest, and attractiveness of the CA.
5. The appeal building, an established dental practice, sits near to a roundabout which links Shackstead Lane to the A3100. The presence of a circular intersection within this part of the CA opens the immediate area which surrounds it, and this creates a vista<sup>1</sup> toward the key focal point of 34-40 Grove Road<sup>2</sup> and the adjacent appeal site. While set behind the building line of

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<sup>1</sup> Vista 5, Figures 3 and 4 of the Ockford Road Conservation Area Appraisal.

<sup>2</sup> Character Area 2 of the Conservation Area.

the properties in Grove Road, the appeal site is experienced from both Shackstead Lane and the A3100 and sits in a prominent position given its elevated level.

6. Section 3.3.2 of the Ockford Road Conservation Area Appraisal 2015 ("the CA Appraisal"), identifies the properties adjoining the appeal site as typical 19th century properties. This part of the CA Appraisal also states that the dental practice is incongruous to the rest of the CA due to its scale and the relationship to the other buildings.
7. The proposed development would introduce two dormer windows to one side of the roof in the elevation facing Shackstead Lane. While the development would not increase the ridge height and would not extend the full width, depth, or height of the existing roof, it would still be prominent given its location in the roof and proposed dimensions. For these reasons it would generate harm by unbalancing the existing building profile while increasing bulk and mass at roof level on an already incongruous building, which sits in an elevated position, within a focal point and recognised vista.
8. I note the appellant confirms that the development would be reduced when compared to an earlier application, however, despite its setback from the properties in Grove Road, the proposed development would significantly and harmfully distract from and disrupt the appreciation of the surrounding historic buildings. This would unacceptably diminish the contribution the existing buildings make to the distinctiveness, interest, and attractiveness of the CA.
9. While there is vegetative screening to the flank boundary of the appeal site facing Shackstead Lane, this would not sufficiently screen the proposed development to an acceptable level to mitigate its impact on the CA. Even if it did, there is no documented evidence before me to suggest that any vegetation could be protected in perpetuity from felling, cutback, disease, or death. This therefore has limited bearing on my overall findings.
10. I also appreciate that some dwellings outside the CA, but near to it, feature existing dormer windows. I do not know the history of these other buildings and what reasoning may have been used to justify them or if they even needed permission. However, they are sited behind the appeal property and further setback from Shackstead Road. Their visual impact is not as prominent as the appeal site and their impact on the CA is not as significant. This, therefore, does not alter my overall findings on this main issue.
11. Paragraph 205 of the National Planning Policy Framework ("the Framework") advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.
12. Given the size of the proposal, I find the harm to be less than substantial in this instance but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. Under such circumstances, paragraph 208 of the Framework says that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
13. The appellant suggests that the appeal would deliver public benefits in the form of an added consultation room to offer dental appointments. I appreciate the importance of dentistry and the role it plays in healthy communities. I also

note the reported general demand for dentists across the country and more locally residents identifying a difficulty in getting timely appointments<sup>3</sup>.

14. That said, paragraph 9.6 of the Godalming & Farncombe Neighbourhood Plan 2019 ("the NP") states that no specific sites are identified within the NP for the provision of additional medical facilities. However, if the Guildford and Waverley Clinical Commissioning Group, identifies a clear need for new provision or the expansion of existing facilities, then this would be supported.
15. It has not, however, been robustly shown in the evidence before me that there would be a clear need or requirement for expanding the facilities specifically at the appeal site. For instance, I have not been provided with evidence from the Guildford and Waverley Clinical Commissioning Group or details about qualifying patient numbers at this practice, specific waiting lists, or how the these relate to the need for more surgery space.
16. I have considered the submitted search of the NHS register<sup>4</sup>. This shows that some existing dental practices are not taking on new patients with the nearest practice, which would take on new patients, being nearly six miles away. While a practice may not take on new patients this could be for a range of reasons, it does not specifically illustrate the extent of demand or need at the appeal site.
17. Accordingly, the evidence before me does not clearly show the level or degree of unmet need in relation to the appeal site specifically. For these reasons, this significantly reduces the weight I ascribe to any additional provision.
18. Notwithstanding my findings on need, I note the appeal proposal would contribute to economic growth by allowing a business to expand and grow with associated employment opportunities. Staff and patients would spend locally and there would also be economic benefits in the form of short-term construction jobs, as well as some expenditure in the building supply industry.
19. I am aware that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth<sup>5</sup>. However, the development would be contrary to the development plan and the aim of the plan-led system is to deliver economic priorities and sustainable development in accordance with the plan. Given I have found the proposed development would be contrary to the development plan this reduces the weight to be given to the economic benefits of the development.
20. The proposed development would also be an effective use of land in an identified settlement area near to the town centre with public transport links, commercial uses, and residential uses nearby. It would also be built to modern standards with measures incorporated to save resources, reduce pollution, and manage surface water run-off. However, given the extent of development, these benefits would carry limited weight.
21. While dentistry is an important service to the community, the appeal building is located within a Conservation Area. I am required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA. I attribute considerable importance and weight to the harm I have identified as part of this appeal decision. Accordingly, taking all the above into

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<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 9.2 of the NP.

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 3 of the appellant's full statement of case.

<sup>5</sup> Paragraph 85 of the Framework.

account, the benefits put forward would not outweigh the notable harm to the character or appearance of the area including the CA.

22. The proposed development would therefore be unacceptably harmful to the significance of the CA. Consequently, the proposed development would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area including the CA. The proposal would therefore conflict with the relevant provisions of Policy HA1 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 1: Strategic Policies and Sites 2018 and Policies DM20 and DM21 of the Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies 2023. These, amongst other things, look to preserve or enhance the significance of the character or appearance of the area including heritage assets.

### **Other Matters**

23. I appreciate the Council found no other harm other than that which is set out in its decision. However, the absence of harm in these aspects has limited bearing on my overall findings.

### **Conclusion**

24. The proposal would conflict with the development plan when taken as a whole and for this reason the appeal should be dismissed. There are also no other material considerations of sufficient weight to indicate a decision should be made contrary to this conclusion.

*N Praine*

INSPECTOR