



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 November 2025

by Mark Caine BSc (Hons) MTPL MRTPI LSRA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/N1540/W/25/3365160

Astra Centre, West Road, Harlow, Essex CM20 2BN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) (the Act) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr S Stevens against the decision of Harlow District Council.
 - The application Ref is HW/FUL/24/00299.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 3 storey office unit with undercroft parking and bin store.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. An email has been received which confirms the appellant's name, and I have used that in the banner heading above.
3. Revised plans have been submitted with the appeal. The appellant has stated that these show an expanded parking layout, updated elevational designs, a street scene and sections. The appeal process should not be used as a means to progress alternatives to a scheme that has been refused. The revisions are fundamentally different from the originally submitted application and so I have determined the appeal based on the original plans considered by the Council.
4. The appellant has also provided further arboricultural evidence and a delivery plan for refuse and delivery vehicles. These are not attempts to evolve the scheme as the proposal itself would be unchanged. Rather they give updates in relation to the main matters in dispute. Furthermore, as they were submitted at the start of the appeal process, the Council has had an opportunity to respond to them and interested parties could have made representations. No unfairness has occurred in this respect.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are;
 - Whether the proposal would provide adequate parking facilities and waste and recycling storage arrangements; and
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, including trees.

Reasons

Parking and waste and recycling storage facilities

6. The appeal site is a roughly rectangular shaped piece of land that is set within a business park that contains 3 separate detached office blocks and large areas of car parking. The proposed building is to be positioned in between 2 of the smaller blocks in an area that is occupied by a bin store enclosure, outside seating area and 3 car parking spaces.
7. Policy IN3 of the Harlow Local Development Plan (December 2020) (HLDP) states that 'vehicle parking must be provided in accordance with the adopted Essex Vehicle Parking Standards (EPS), unless otherwise indicated elsewhere in the local plan and/or supporting documents'. The proposal would provide a total of 8 car parking spaces. It is common ground between the main parties that this would fall short of the EPS by 4 spaces and I have no reason to disagree.
8. I recognise that the policy justification, at paragraph 17.24 'provides a flexible approach to the provision of parking' and allows the Council to 'accept fewer parking spaces in areas of good public transport accessibility'. In this regard, although the appeal site is close to a bus route it is around a 25-minute walk away from the local railway station. Moreover, the purpose of the EPS is stated to minimise the risk of parking problems, particularly around key destinations such as employment sites.
9. My site observations confirmed that the business park's car park is NCP managed and requires all vehicles to hold valid permits. Whilst the entire car park was not full at the time of my site visit, the 3 existing spaces adjacent to the appeal site had cars parked on them. There was also an additional car parked outside of a bay next to the existing bin store enclosure.
10. Furthermore, parking on West Road is restricted by double yellow lines, with the majority of other buildings in the area having their own dedicated car parks. There are some on street bays on South Road, however these were heavily parked, with no spaces available at all at the time of my morning site visit. Whilst this is a snapshot in time, there is little before me to suggest that demand for parking is lower in this established Employment Area.
11. I have been informed that the appellant's business has specific space requirements, and that the existing parking is intended to serve both the new office space and the pre-existing facilities on the site. It has also been put to me that the appellant has control over all the parking within the estate and can provide the additional 4 car parking spaces required close to the new unit without effecting the existing units on the site.
12. However, no details of these specific space requirements, including ownership, permit allocation per unit, or the location of the additional 4 spaces are before me. Nor has any substantive evidence, in respect of existing and likely additional trip generation or a car parking survey been provided by any party. I am also mindful that the design and access statement sets out that the proposal could accommodate between 30-40 employees.
13. Furthermore, whilst the appellant's commitment to providing secure and covered cycle parking is recognised, and I note the ECC Highways consultation response,

no details of the amount, size, and scale of any cycle storage has been provided, and it is unclear where this would be able to be located on the site.

14. In the absence of such evidence, I am therefore unable to be certain that the proposal would not add to or cause on or off-street car parking problems, to the detriment of highway safety. In reaching this view I have had regard to the crashmap data in respect of accidents along West Road. Nonetheless, I do not consider the lack of recorded incidents on this highway to be a persuasive justification for increasing the potential risk of an accident occurring in the future.
15. Furthermore, although the appellant's have provided a swept path analysis drawing, I do not have the full details of how the current refuse storage for the existing buildings, which would be lost to make way for the proposed building, in addition to that for the proposal, would be accounted for.
16. Whilst it is annotated on the submitted plans that a bin store would be provided in a room on the proposed ground floor this appears to be smaller than the refuse storage area that it is replacing. As such, I cannot be certain that the proposed building's ground floor would be of sufficient size to accommodate the refuse storage for the proposed and existing buildings on the business park. In reaching this view, I am mindful that the Council's Cleansing and Environment team has also raised concerns about the suitability of this store to accommodate residual and recyclable materials.
17. Additionally, I have not been provided with the wording and full details of any potential planning condition to ensure, as the appellant suggests, that sustainable traffic methods are provided to all employees using the proposed building. I am therefore unable to be sure that the imposition of such a condition would overcome all of the harm that I have identified.
18. In conclusion, there is insufficient evidence before me to justify the parking provision proposed or demonstrate that the proposal would provide adequate parking and waste and recycling storage facilities. I thereby find that the proposal conflicts with Policies IN2 and IN3 of the HLDP, which require parking standards to be met, and to ensure the safety of all highway users.

Character and appearance

19. The business park sits behind a substantial grass verge that contains a line of mature trees that provides a landscaped edge along Edinburgh Way. This helps to soften the built environment and contributes positively to the character and appearance of the area.
20. I appreciate that the visual separation provided by the appeal site allows views of the clocktower on the larger unit to the south and that this may have been a part of the original design concept for the Astra Centre business park. Nonetheless, the height of the proposed building is similar to those of the neighbouring blocks to either side of it.
21. Although the proposal has a much smaller footprint than all of these buildings, there would be sufficient space retained between it and the neighbouring blocks to ensure that it would not appear cramped, overdeveloped, or at odds with the prevailing character of the immediate surroundings. This space would allow some views of the clocktower from Edinburgh Way to be retained. I am also satisfied that

sufficient elevational detail has been provided in the originally submitted plans to demonstrate that the proposed building would sympathetically integrate with its surroundings.

22. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the nearby trees' roots would be adversely affected by the proposal. The arboricultural impact assessment submitted with the appeal indicates that the proposed building would not encroach into the root protection areas of the trees and I have no reason to question this. Moreover, careful controls in terms of construction methods, level changes and protective measures, in accordance with British Standards, could be secured by condition, which would safeguard the tree and the landscaped character of the area.
23. I therefore find that the proposed development would not harm the character and appearance of the area. As such it would not conflict with Policies PL1 and PL7 of the HLDP, which seek amongst other things, to achieve high standards of design and to ensure that trees and hedges are protected and enhanced.

Other Matters

24. If planning permission was granted there would be a requirement to submit a biodiversity gain plan for approval before development could proceed. That plan should include details of the pre-development biodiversity value of the on-site habitat as per paragraph 14(2) of Schedule 7A of the Act. The Council is not satisfied that the statutory 10% biodiversity net gain could be achieved. However, as the appeal is to be dismissed in any event this matter does not form a further objection.
25. It has been put forward that the proposal would encourage entrepreneurship, economic regeneration and business growth. Some limited social and economic benefits would be generated in relation to short term employment in the construction industry and longer-term job creation for future employees of the proposed development, who would also spend and contribute to the local economy. Other small benefits include the proposed materials being sourced locally where possible and the installation of electric charging points.

Conclusion

26. Although I have found that there would be no adverse impact regarding the proposal's effect on the character and appearance of the area, these, and the other matters identified above, are significantly outweighed by the unacceptable harm that would be caused in respect of the lack of provision of adequate parking, waste and recycling facilities.
27. For the reasons given above, the proposed development conflicts with the development plan and there are no material considerations that warrant taking a decision otherwise than in accordance with it. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

Mark Caine

INSPECTOR