
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 September 2013

by Simon Hand MA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 3 October 2013

Appeal Ref: APP/D1780/A/13/2194378
11 Westwood Road, Southampton, SO17 1DL

- 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 Orchard Homes and Developments Ltd against the decision of Southampton City Council.
 - The application Ref 12/00838/FUL, dated 31 May 2012, was refused by notice dated 14 January 2013.
 - The development proposed is redevelopment of the site. Demolition of the existing building and erection of a part 4-storey and part 5-storey building to provide 13 flats (4 x 1-bedroom, 4 x 2-bedroom and 5 x 3-bedroom) with associated parking to the front and rear.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. No 11 Westwood Road is a substantial Edwardian villa that has been extended to the rear and now contains offices, which stands on the corner of Norcliffe Road, a short cul-de-sac. Westwood Road was once full of such villas of varying sizes and styles and many have survived today. However, there are also many newer and generally larger buildings, usually containing flats. In terms of height and mass, the proposal is not unusual in this road, and there is a wide variety of building types all along Westwood Road. What is most noticeable is that the prevailing idiom is of domestic-style architecture, albeit scaled up sometimes to a very large scale indeed. What all these buildings have in common is pitched roofs and articulated facades, often taking cues from the villa designs remaining in the road.
4. There are a number of more 'modernist' flat roofed and plain facaded blocks of flats, but these are generally further up the road, and are well screened by trees and vegetation, which is another distinctive feature of Westwood Road. By way of contrast the appeal site and its immediate neighbour to the east, Buckingham Court, are more open, and will be more so once the tall hedge and new street tree in front of No 11 are removed to allow the development to go ahead.

5. Buckingham Court is a particularly good example of the flat roofed, large windowed building that could be nothing other than a modern block of flats and that are found all over the country. It stands out as quite alien in the otherwise much more domestic and traditional character of Westwood road. At the moment it is seen as very much of a one-off. The only other similar modern block of flats is The Atrium, some way to the east, and this has a distinctive circular central core and curved balconies.
6. The appeal proposal is another unapologetically modern, rectangular, flat roofed block of flats. Although quite different in detail from Buckingham Court it echoes it in its design concept. The overall impact of introducing such a design into this location is to create a small cluster of modern blocks of flats which reinforces the incongruity of this type of building in this particular road. The only open section of this bottom half of Westwood Road, where screening trees in front gardens and in the street are absent, will become dominated by a style of building that is otherwise conspicuously absent from the area. The prominence of the appeal building will add to the sense of incongruity and harm caused and it would be contrary to policy CS13 "fundamentals of design" of the Southampton City Council Core Strategy (2010), as it would not respond positively and integrate with its local surroundings.
7. Looking more closely at the specific design of the proposal I agree with the Council that the balconies are unacceptable. They are very large in comparison to the overall scale of the building. At the front, but particularly at the rear of the building, they appear crammed together, dominating the façades. I assume this is to provide the amenity space required, as there is very little shared space at ground level. This tends to support the Council's view that the whole site would be overdeveloped. There is very little room at the front or rear for landscaping and these areas will be dominated by car parking. Many other flatted developments in the road have front and rear parking, but they all seemed to be occupying larger spaces, allowing for better landscaping so that from the road level the car parking is not prominent. I accept there may be less car parking than at present, but the relationship of cars to the existing much smaller and attractive Edwardian villa is quite different than to the taller and hugely more dominant flats proposed, where the amount of ground level space will appear both to be less and to be filled with cars.
8. I also consider the east elevation, that would run along Norcliffe Road is particularly bland. Even the side façade of Buckingham Court opposite is broken up by a large number of windows. The proposed eastern elevation would be very plain and almost threatening in its austerity. Taking all these matters of detailed design together, the proposal is also contrary to the requirement of CS13 to contribute positively to local distinctiveness.
9. Policy CS13 also warns against making a 'pastiche of the past' and there is nothing wrong with a well designed and innovative modern building, as The Atrium shows, but unfortunately I do not consider the appeal proposal is such a building. I accept there are benefits in providing a mix of flat sizes, and the principle of the development is in accord with the National Planning Policy Framework, but that does not outweigh the serious design issues I have identified which would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area.

10. I note the Council also refused the proposal because of a lack of a s106 obligation to secure funding for affordable housing, highway improvements, strategic transport improvements, open space and repairs to the road caused by development. The appellant subsequently provided such an obligation. Had the proposal been acceptable on design grounds this obligation could have formed the basis for a satisfactory resolution of that reason for refusal. However, I have not pursued this as the appeal fails for the reasons mentioned above.

Simon Hand

Inspector