

284



The Planning Inspectorate

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Your ref:
Our ref: APP/Q0505/A/95/258773/P2
Cncl ref: C/0064/95
Date:

02 FEB 1996

Dear Sirs

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990, SECTION 78 AND SCHEDULE 6
APPLICATION NO: C/0064/95

1. I have been appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment to determine your appeal against the decision of the Cambridge City Council to refuse planning permission for the erection of 2 1-bedroom flats at Tuscan Court, Pakenham Close, Cambridge. I have considered the written representations made by you and by the Council, and by interested persons, including those made directly to the Council. I inspected the site on 17 January 1996.
2. From what I have seen and read, I have to decide mainly whether the proposed development would cause significantly adverse harm to the character and appearance of the area, or to the amenities of neighbouring residents. The importance of respecting townscape quality in new building design is stressed in the draft local plan for Cambridge.
3. The area about Pakenham Close is quite densely developed with smaller houses and flats. Nonetheless, the distribution of open spaces, if only in the form of accesses, parking areas and garage courts, gives some ambience to the buildings and forestalls any sense of cramped development. The site is one of these open areas.
4. Presently, it serves as parking space for flats in the three 2 storey blocks forming Tuscan Court. It is a hard surfaced area lying between the houses nos. 34 and 35 Pakenham Close. There is a sparse overgrown hedge on the north eastern boundary with no. 34 and a close boarded fence on the south western boundary with no. 35. The site has a frontage of some 11 m, or thereabouts, to Pakenham Close, along which there are bollards, and a hawthorn tree. To the rear, at a distance of about 11 m from the rear site boundary, is one of the Tuscan Court blocks.
5. The proposed building would be end-on to the road frontage, set back in line with no. 34 but projecting back beyond it. The width of the new building would be some 5.2 m, and it would be separated from the curtilage of no. 35 by an access to Tuscan Court 3 m wide. You

give the distance to no. 34 as 4.75 m. The distance to the house would be greater than to the curtilage boundary by a little more than the width of the hedge, and the plot tapers in somewhat to the rear. So the distance varies, but the figure you quote would indicate a possible maximum.

6. The present pattern of spaces is important in keeping some sense of openness in this area, and the loss of the site would be significant in this respect. It serves both as part of the setting for the Tuscan Court buildings, and also as a useful break in the Pakenham Close frontage. There would be material harm if those advantages were to be lost by development, as proposed. The remaining effective width of open land of barely more than 3 m, represented mainly by the new access, would in this context be negligible. Also, the nature of the building's design would inevitably emphasise the fact that it would sit sandwiched sideways between 2 dwellings fronting Pakenham Close. It would thereby, in my judgement, look very incongruous.

7. The Inspector who decided an earlier appeal about residential development on the site, in 1987, also took the view that the building then proposed would fill much of the site frontage and create a cramped, irregular terraced effect seriously at odds with and unacceptably detracting from the area. Seeking to distinguish that case, you draw to my attention that the overall floor space now proposed is 102.6 sq m, rather than 148.6 sq m, as then. I arrive at my conclusion on the merits of the scheme before me. For the reasons stated, my judgement is that the proposed scheme would so detract from the character and appearance of the area as to make it unacceptable.

8. 34 Pakenham Close is a semi-detached house with a very small rear garden. A wall of the proposed building would be very close to the common boundary, projecting back beyond the rear of the house and hence in proximity to the garden. Overlooking could be avoided by not having windows in that elevation, but the building itself would appear very overbearing and intrusive to the adjoining residents, when in their garden. There would be a mass of brickwork at very close quarters. It may be that some boundary treatment could augment the hedge and help to screen the building, but only at the cost of substituting another source of oppressiveness. This provides another reason why permission cannot be granted, for the materially adverse impact of the proposed development on the amenities of these neighbouring residents.

9. I have assessed all other matters raised, but having found nothing to outweigh my conclusions on the issues identified, I decide accordingly.

10. For the above reasons, and in exercise of the powers transferred to me I hereby dismiss this appeal.

Yours faithfully



J M TURNER LLB Solicitor
Inspector