

Appeal Decision

Site visit made 15 October 2020

By Ruth Reed BA DipArch MA PGCertEd PPRIBA HonAIA FRIAS

An Independent Scheme of Management Inspector
Appointed by the Heritage Foundation Letchworth Garden City

Decision date 26 October 2020

Appeal Reference RR/2020/008

35 Aubreys, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 3TU

- The appeal is made by [REDACTED] against refusal of consent under the Scheme of Management of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation for the application submitted on 5 November 2019.
 - Consent was refused by the Heritage Advisory Team on 21 November 2019. It was reviewed by the Advisory Management Committee on 12 March 2020 and the decision to refuse was upheld by the Vice Chair of the Housing Applications Committee 24 April 2020 under delegated powers.
 - The development is frontage alterations including increased hardstanding (retrospective).
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Decision

1. The appeal against frontage alterations including increased hardstanding (retrospective) is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in this case is the impact of the alterations to the frontage of 35 Aubreys to the character of the area.

Reasons

3. 35 Aubreys is a detached house with an integral double garage now converted to other uses. Originally the drive to the property was the width of the garage and the path to the front door. It was also approximately the width of the crossing to the highway. The original drive occupied over 50% of the area of the front of the property because of the line of the boundary with the neighbouring property, 33 Aubreys, cuts across the frontage of number 35.

4. The expanded drive now accommodates three cars, originally it would have held two. It is now nearly the full width of the frontage with a strip reserved on the boundary to no 33 along which a hedge has been planted and a short border with shrubs that remains to the back edge of the pavement. An area of artificial grass has been laid under the front ground floor window.
5. Aubreys is the looped spine road around an estate of detached houses constructed in the 1980's. It lies in a Modern Character Area. The soft landscaping of trees and hedges to the front gardens and public spaces is generally mature. It is an attractive and spacious environment.
6. The appellant asked me to view other driveways on the estate. Many of these examples had been submitted to the Heritage Advisory Service as part of the application process and the Heritage Foundation have provided me with the background to each. These examples are not before me to comment on, but fall broadly into three categories, they are the original line of the drive, they have been consented by the Heritage Foundation or they have been refused and the householders will be required to reinstate them to the original configuration. Each situation has been judged separately on its own merits.
7. From my walk around the estate it appears that almost all residents park on their property and there was little on-street parking. The appellant highlighted the desirability of minimising this. I was advised that the streets come under pressure at school collection and delivery times, but at other times there was little kerb-side parking.
8. The trees and hedgerows between properties and across frontages reduces the visual dominance of cars on the estate. However, in some areas it is apparent that this character could become eroded by the dominance of hard landscaping to accommodate additional parking on the plots.
9. The driveway had been increased in width to remove the need for the appellant to park on the road. His need for parking on his plot is understood but this need is by its nature temporary in the lifetime of the estate, the permanent loss of soft landscaping is to the enduring detriment of the area.
10. The Design Principles for Modern Character Areas is explicit in seeking to protect the dominance of soft landscape in the streets of the Garden City. The requirement for 50% of the frontage to be soft landscape is the general requirement. Clearly where the original estate layout did not provide it, this standard cannot be achieved subsequently. However, it does not mean that where the standard was not met when the estate was built, the situation can be used to justify a further reduction in the amount of soft landscaping.
11. The requirement is not only for the visual character of Letchworth but also to prevent excessive surface water run-off. In the case before me, the surface water is directed to a drainage channel and soakaway.

12. The Design Principles for Modern Character Areas are also explicit in stating that artificial grass is not acceptable on property frontages. Although it is not particularly visible from the street it is incongruous in an area of high landscape values.
13. The driveway constructed at 35 Aubreys is dominant in the street scene, not only in its extent across the frontage but also because it has the minimum of screening along the back edge of the pavement. Oblique views will be screened as the boundary hedges to the property mature, however these will not screen the extent of the driveway visible from immediately in front of the property.

Conclusions

14. Having read the submissions and seen the site and its context I conclude that the alterations to the frontage of 35 Aubreys are harmful to the street scene and not in accordance with the Design Principles for Modern Character Areas. The appeal is dismissed.

Ruth Reed

Independent Scheme of Management Inspector