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9th Jul 2018

REF: 18/01238/FPH

RE: Counter to objections received from 8b Park Lane, Knebworth for planning application 18/01238/FPH.

Dear Mr Glover,

The following are counter arguments to the objections raised by 8b Park Lane, Knebworth in relation to planning application 18/01238/FPH.

Copies of this letter will also be forwarded to the councillors for the ward.

Background

In the first instance I would like to provide some historic context to the planning application.

- When originally considering buying the new-build property in 2015, we were concerned that the ground floor was disproportionately small relative to the rest of the house. For a 5 bedroom property we felt storage on the ground floor was limited and it generally felt a bit squashed.

- Before buying the property we contacted the NHDC planning department to enquire about planning permission restrictions. It was confirmed by Tom Rea that permitted development rights had not been removed, so we knew we had options for potentially modifying the property in future if required.

- Since living in the property it has become very evident that storage on the ground floor is an issue - especially with children.

- We have considered a range of options for addressing this, most of which will be complex and costly projects. These include a kitchen extension, porch, and carport infill. At some point in the future we would certainly like to complete all three but this is very much dependent on our personal and financial situation. We have a young family, so time and money are somewhat limited at this point in time. We do still have an immediate requirement for additional space however which is why we would like to infill the carport to create a double length garage. We anticipate that this will be a relatively simple, quick and cost effective solution for freeing up storage.

- In Feb 2018, we invited our immediate neighbours (Samantha and Gareth Stinton) from 8b Park Lane to our house to explain our plans. We did this in a spirit of transparency and to give them an opportunity to voice any concerns. The plans were explained in some depth, including any potential issues. Assurances were given regarding the parking situation, and the disruption while any work would be undertaken. They told us that they had no objection with the development.

- Plans were submitted some two months later, very soon after which we were received notification of 8b's objections. Given the amount of time that had elapsed between the initial discussion and the submission of the planning permission application we were surprised at how comprehensive the objections were.

Counter Arguments

The following are our counter arguments to the key objections raised. To keep things as concise as possible, for each counter argument I have referenced the associated numbered objection from Samantha Stinton's correspondence. Any objection not directly referenced is not deemed to be a planning issue, for instance impact on property values.

1. 8b's carport will become unusable due to inadequate space to open car doors.

Addresses Objection 1, 2, 3

- After a partition is erected, the carport spaces on both sides will be no more narrow than a regular parking space, and will in fact remain wider than the dimensions specified in the "Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), Vehicle Parking At New Developments"[i], section 2.19, which states that garages which are at least 3.0m by 7.0m will be counted towards the parking provision for a property. I understand that the carport is not a garage, but I think it is reasonable to assume the same dimensions would be applicable in this instance. As it stands, the width of the car port is wider than 3.0m, approximately 3.2m. A single skin brick partition will reduce this by 100mm to 3.1m, but in practice this space will be taken from our side as the partition would be erected on our boundary. As such there will be no loss of space from our neighbour's carport, and the space in both car ports will remain within the width outlined in the SPD for what can be provisioned as a car parking space.

- While it is true to say that a partition will reduce by how far car doors can currently be opened within the carport, it will only be restricted by the amount into which they currently encroach the neighbouring boundary.

- The modification will affect both carports. We will need to park our car in the newly enlarged garage, so our space absolutely needs to be usable for this purpose. We would not consider this modification if this was not possible.

- Further to the above, I have tested opening the doors on our BMW when parked in our car port (a larger vehicle than our neighbour's), and I can confirm that if the car is parked centrally, there is adequate space to open car doors on both sides sufficiently to allow passengers to exit the vehicle. There is also adequate space to remove a child seat. Being parents to both a newborn and a preschooler, this is something we do on a regular basis on the side of the car which opens against the existing wall, and we have no issues. On this basis, and the fact that 8b's carport has the same dimensions as our own, it is difficult to conclude how their carport will become unusable.

2. Detrimental impact on existing shared driveway and safe access to highway.

Addresses Objection 4, 5, 9

- According to the original planning application for the four-plot development (14/00747/ 1), each property was allocated two car parking spaces. In addition, a visitor's space was provisioned for shared use between the properties. We could not determine from the planning document exactly how the parking spaces were specifically allocated to each property, however in practice for both ourselves at 8a and our neighbours at 8b, the carport is used for one space, and the space immediately in front of the front door of each property is used as the second space. This arrangement has worked well for the time that we have occupied the property, and there have been no implications to accessing the highway safely - there is sufficient space to pass any cars parked immediately front of the houses without compromising safe access to the highway. The proposed modification will not change this arrangement in anyway - the carport will simply be enclosed, and our second car will be parked in the enlarged garage.

- There will be no loss of car parking space - the enlarged garage that will be created will once again be much larger than the parameters laid down in the "Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), Vehicle Parking At New Developments"[i], section 2.19, which states that garages of at least 3.0m by 7.0m will be counted towards the parking provision for the property. Infilling the carport will create a garage 12.0m by 3.0m.

3. Aesthetic concerns due to uneven appearance of the development's façade.

Addresses Objection 7

- The fundamental aesthetics of the house will remain unchanged, the garage door will simply be in a different place.

- All building work will be sympathetic to the existing architecture - same bricks, architectural style, white garage door etc.

- The architecture of the street is quite diverse. Knebworth village hall and Trinity Church are opposite, and Howard Court and Tricia House flank our development, the latter of which are 1980s style apartment blocks, so have a significantly different appearance to our development.

- The carports are set back from the road by a reasonable distance and there is foliage at the front of the property - as can be seen on Google Maps - so we believe this makes any differences less noticeable from the street.

- In my experience it is more conventional for integrated garages to be flush with the façade of a house.

4. Double length garage would not be used for parking cars.

Addresses Objection 8

- The space will be used for the regular activities for which a garage is typically needed - storage, parking vehicles, DIY.

- At no point has it been stated that the space will be used exclusively as a workshop - as has been stated in the objection letter from 8b Park Lane. I understand that the submitted plans indicate this, but this is a typo on the part of the architect. The planning application is to create a double length garage.

- The motivation for the modification is to both make more efficient usage of the space within the garage and to improve security. As has been stated above, the ground floor of the property is disproportionately small compared with the rest of the house. This can present some challenges for storage, especially with a growing family. In addition to the regular items stored in the garage, we are increasingly needing to find space for garden toys, bicycles, buggies, car seats, etc. I am also a member of a Triathlon club so have a need to securely store race bikes which are very expensive. The existing garage door is thin steel and not particularly robust, so would be vulnerable to a determined thief.

- Presently there are two piers which flank the current garage door. The plan is to remove these to provide an uninterrupted space along the walls for storing bikes, and wall-mounted storage. In addition, the existing up-and-over garage door consumes a lot of wall space, limiting storage options – a great deal of space is wasted above the rails that support the garage door when it is open. By moving the garage door forward and infilling the carport, and thus increasing the length of the garage, a significant amount of space can be freed up, and much more efficient usage of the existing space can be achieved.

- I have already specified an electric garage door to the architect which is significantly more secure than the existing garage door, and has additional space-saving options for internal fixing. The electric nature of the garage door will facilitate parking a car easily without having to alight, and provide convenient access to buggies which we would be stored internally against the wall.

- We will still be using the space for a car, so any internal modifications for storage cannot inhibit the ability to park a car.

Summary

- There will be no material impact to the usability of 8b's carport. There will be adequate space to open car doors, and the erection of a partition will not reduce the space within either car port to less than the width specified in the Supplementary Planning Document for what can be provisioned as a car parking space. Any loss in space will only by the amount into which car doors currently encroach into the neighbouring boundary.
- The aesthetics will be in-keeping with the existing design of the property and will not look odd in context of the development and the diversity of other surrounding properties.
- The extended garage will free up much-needed space to provide additional storage. A more secure electric garage door will be installed to improve security, and to provide convenient access for parking cars and accessing items such as buggies. Internal storage will not inhibit the ability to park a car.
- Parking will not be compromised because a space has not been lost, it will simply be enclosed The enlarged garage created will be much larger than the dimensions laid down in the Supplementary Planning Document for what can be provisioned as a car parking space. Safe access to the highway will not be compromised - parking arrangements will remain as they are now.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Collins

[i] https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/files/vehicle_parking_at_new_development_spd_sept_2011.pdf