



Comment on 25/00046/FUL - 29 Highton Street Sheffield S6 3TQ

Summary:

Hallamshire Historic Buildings objects to this proposal for the following reasons:

- Loss of a Non-Designated Heritage Asset, contrary to policies BE20, NPPF208 and NPPF216;
- Loss of existing garden space which would harm the character of the neighbourhood, contrary to policy H14(c), NPPF129(d), NPPF135, CS74(c) and NDG41;
- The proposal does not provide adequate private gardens or communal open space as required by H15(b) and NDG131, nor does the landscape design meet the requirements of BE6;
- Use of fibre cement roof tiles fails to respect townscape character and associated materials as required by CS74(c) and is not sympathetic to local character and history as required by NPPF135(c) and NDG41;
- The proposed density of approximately 128 dwellings per hectare greatly exceeds the standard laid down in CS26(c);
- Arrangements for accommodating refuse bins is wholly inadequate and contrary to NDG134;
- As the development is not well-designed as described in National Design Guide paragraphs 41, 129, 131 and 134 it should be refused as required by NPPF139.

As the site is a Non-Designated Heritage Asset, we believe that the applicant should be required to produce a Heritage Statement, in accordance with NPPF207. This must include a survey of the interior highlighting any surviving original or historic features, and also of ancillary structures and boundaries. It should be written independently and must not function as an advocacy statement, to comply with Historic England guidelines.

In all events, the applicant should be required to carry out building recording and to advance understanding of the significance of this Non-Designated Heritage Asset as required by NPPF218.

NPPF refers to the National Planning Policy Framework December 2024.

NDG refers to the National Design Guide January 2021.

Non-Designated Heritage Asset

No. 29 Highton Street is a heritage asset that contributes significantly to the character of the historic suburb of Walkley. It is an early building of the Freedom Hill Land Society, formed in 1851. Freehold Land Societies enabled those of modest means to become property owners meeting the minimum value of 40 shillings required to be allowed to vote. They were the successors of the Chartists in that they mobilised the working population to extend the franchise, continuing a historically important tradition of radicalism in Sheffield.

Walkley had a particularly high concentration of these societies and as a result developed rapidly during the second half of the 19th century. Some societies enabled their members to borrow money to build their own houses, but some did not, and many owners chose to use their plot as an allotment. The predominant layout of terraced houses to the front or rear of all plots results from these being sold on for building after the closure of the society. This piecemeal development lends the area its special character with adjacent houses having different appearances, in contrast with the uniformity of commercial development.

In a few cases owners were able to build a modest dwelling, referred to as a "garden house", and No. 29 Highton Street is of this type. It is believed to be the sole surviving example of this latter type in Sheffield, and so is of extreme rarity.

An early resident, Matilda Froggatt, was evicted from the property after the death of her husband, who unbeknownst to her had sold it. Suffering from symptoms suggesting poor mental health she waged a campaign against the new owners resulting in her imprisonment, and she is understood to have eventually died of starvation. The site is therefore of social significance as a well-documented illustration of the brutal reality of the disempowerment of women and those without property, and the contemporary lack of care for the mentally ill.

BE20 says that the retention of historic buildings of local interest will be encouraged, while NPPF208 calls on local planning authorities to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

We do not consider that the public benefit of providing a very modest number of homes outweighs the loss of this rare and important NDHA. This is particularly so in light of the small size of the dwellings, their excessive density, and the very low standard of external amenity. It therefore does not meet the test outlined in NPPF216.

Loss of garden space

The character of Walkley as a whole and the neighbourhood immediately around Highton Street in particular is defined by its development by Freehold Land Societies in the mid-19th century. Plots were originally of 600 square yards, although some have been subdivided lengthwise, each resulting plot having just one dwelling. The prevailing townscape form is of modest houses with long gardens. Whereas most plots were developed with dwellings at the very front or rear of their plots, often after the closure of the Freehold Land Society, in the case of No. 29 a rare and historically significant "garden house" central to the plot survives, meaning that in this case the character is defined both by the size of the garden and by the specific position of the dwelling.

H14(c) makes unacceptable developments that would cause serious loss of existing garden space which would harm the character of the neighbourhood. CS74(c) sets an expectation that developments will respect the townscape character of the city's districts including in their layout. Paragraph (d) highlights the particular value of the city's Victorian suburbs and explanatory paragraph 12.14 places special emphasis on this.

NPPF129(d) requires that in planning for an appropriate density of development account should be taken of the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), and NPPF135 requires developments to be sympathetic to local character and history, including the landscape setting.

NDG41 says that well-designed places respond positively to local heritage and character and to landscape character.

The proposal departs radically from the prevailing character, turning most of the plot over to hardstanding for car parking and leaving only minimal green space which cannot reasonably be described as "garden". It also destroys the historic layout of a "garden house" central to the plot.

Private communal open space

H15(b) requires that developments provide adequate private gardens or communal open space. The proposal is for nine flats to be provided with no private garden space and only a very small quantity of communal open space. The three flats in the southern block would have a 50m² grassed area adjacent and a much smaller paved terrace. The six flats in the northern block would have an even smaller grassed area, divided into two, and a similar sized paved terrace, all of it immediately adjacent to a much larger car park.

NDG131 states that well-designed places include shared amenity spaces that are social spaces providing opportunities for comfort, relaxation and stimulation - including play - for residents, well overlooked and easily accessible by all of the residents who share them. The quantity of space is far too small to accommodate play, the

fragmentation of the space adjacent to the northern block making it of little use for anything. Residents of the six upper floor flats have poor access to the shared space, all reaching it by exiting from the far side of the block, and in the case of the northern block having then to walk along the street frontage and the shared drive. In practice the very limited space is likely to be monopolised by ground floor residents who have direct access to it.

While the shared spaces are overlooked, this is from bedrooms, not rooms likely to be occupied during the daytime, and it is unlikely that any resident with a child would feel secure in allowing them to use the space unsupervised. The space adjacent to the northern block is uncomfortable and potentially unsafe owing to the proximity of moving vehicles and the pollution emitted by them.

BE6 calls for good quality landscape design. The minimal amount of open space prevents any meaningful attempt at landscape design and would not provide an interesting and attractive environment as required by paragraph (b).

Materials

The proposal is for the roof to be constructed of fibre cement tiles. Walkley is a Victorian suburb and natural slate is the overwhelmingly prevalent roofing material, which is especially appropriate on new buildings that emulate the vernacular as in this case.

NPPF135 requires developments to be sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment. NDG41 says that well-designed places respond positively to existing built development, including materials, and also to local heritage and character.

CS74(c) sets an expectation that developments will respect the townscape character of the city's districts including in their materials, and paragraph (d) highlights the particular value of the city's Victorian suburbs. Fibre cement is not an appropriate roofing material and should be replaced by natural slate.

Density

CS26(c) specifies a density range of 40 to 60 dwellings per hectare in areas near to high-frequency bus routes in urban areas, which is a fair description of the site. Based on an estimated site area of 700m² the proposed 9 dwellings would create a density in excess of 128 dwellings per hectare. This is a significant and unacceptable increase both on the density specified by policy and the prevailing local density.

Refuse bins

NDG134 states that in well-designed developments where refuse bins are required to be on a street frontage or in a location that is visible from a street, they are sited within well-designed refuse stores that are easy for occupants to use. In this proposal the whole street frontage is marked as the area for bins, enclosed by a low stone wall. More bins are shown by the group of four parking spaces and these will be visible from the street, as may be the further bins at the rear of the southern block.

The positioning of bins to the street frontage is clearly detrimental to local amenity, as would be the provision of bin stores in the same location. Building the front wall higher to conceal these would be similarly detrimental.

National Design Guide

NPPF139 states that development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design. NDG15 states that the guide provides a series of tests for assessing whether a place is well-designed or not. If they are not met, then it can be concluded that it is not well-designed.

As described above the proposal fails to meet a number of tests laid down in the NDG, including those in paragraphs 41, 129, 131 and 134, meaning that in its current form it should be refused.

Conditions

In the event that permission is granted for this scheme, the following conditions should be imposed:

- A “no premature demolition” condition that requires a contract for construction to be in place before any demolition takes place. This is one of the reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss of a heritage asset, as required by NPPF217;
- Recording of the buildings, in accordance with NPPF218;
- Provision of a plaque on site, preferably located so as to be visible to the public, providing information about the history of the site, to meet the requirement to advance understanding of significance described in NPPF218.

We also propose that buildings on site be named to commemorate the site’s history and its occupants. This would be in the spirit of NPPF218, although we recognise that it may not be possible to impose a condition to this effect.