

Comments for Planning Application 127300/FO/2020

Application Summary

Application Number: 127300/FO/2020

Address: 8 Birch Polygon Manchester M14 5HX

Proposal: Erection of a single storey rear extension and conversion of property to provide 5 no. self contained apartments with associated elevational alterations, car parking and landscaping

Case Officer: Dave Morris

Customer Details

Name: Not Available

Address: Not Available

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Neighbour

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

Comment: In response to the invitation to comment on this proposed plans for No 8 Birch Polygon, I would like to record the following points in objection to the scheme.

Some of my objections relate to my personal circumstances as a long-term resident of this area and one whose garden backs on to part of 8 Birch Polygon, but I would also point to ways in which the proposed plans misrepresent the neighbourhood of Birch-in-Rusholme, run counter to Manchester City Council policy with regard to regeneration of this area and do not provide high standard accommodation..

A. The neighbourhood of Birch-in-Rusholme (as bounded by Brighton Grove, Wilmslow Road, Dickenson Road and Birch Polygon)

The Application document entitled 'Planning, Design and Access Statement' includes the following: 'The applicant respectfully disagrees with the Council that proposals for its conversion should be considered as the loss of family accommodation'(3.4). And a section of the document is concerned with a history of 8 Birch Polygon as a premises 'not providing family style accommodation' and 'would require substantial internal refurbishment and re-planning to make it useable as such'(2.8). This last point seems especially ironic as it is used in an introduction to a planning application that itself anticipates considerable internal and external refurbishment and re-planning, including an extension that is surely an example of overdevelopment. Whilst MCC planning policy does recognise that families may wish to alter and extend properties to accommodate changing family needs, the impetus for a further extension to this already once extended building is to meet the needs of a property developer.

The main point here, however, is that the Application fails to acknowledge the nature of the neighbourhood. The map that is included in the Context statement does not offer a full picture of property use. A wider view with a less confined map would indicate four main features:

1) Use of larger houses for family use. It is interesting that the writer of the Planning Inspectorate Report into no 10 Birch Polygon (determined 25 February 2020)

wrote of the area: 'Whilst the evidence and my observations on site indicated that flats and apartments are common within the locality, so too are family sized dwellings.' (Section 12).

The evidence is there: no 6 Birch Polygon is a seven bedroom family home, no 5 is a commune-owned property which functions as a family home and whilst no 10 is currently unoccupied it was designated a family home both by MCC when it refused planning permission for conversion to an HMO and by the Planning Inspectorate which supported the Council's decision.

Furthermore, the semi-detached property (7 and 9 Birch Grove) at the rear of 8 Birch Polygon is comprised of two five bedroom family homes, and Birch Grove, itself, is largely made up of four and five bedroom family residences. No 28 Birch Grove has just been sold to a family who are now in the process of restoring what was previously a lodging house to its former use as a family home. It is also significant that many of the objections lodged with Manchester City Council against the planning applications made in respect of no 10 Birch Polygon came from the occupants of larger family homes in Birch Grove, Norman Road and Hall Road.

2) Use of smaller properties as family homes. Had the map been extended to show the whole of Birch Polygon from where the road branches, it would have revealed a significant number of smaller properties that, both rented and owner occupied, are used by families and young professionals. The Planning Application for no 8 does include provision for a ground floor family apartment that, tellingly, 'would meet the minimum space standard for a three bed home'. But the need for smaller three-bedroom accommodation is already well-catered for in Birch Polygon in homes that do not just 'meet' minimum standards.

3) Use of larger properties divided into flats and apartments. The map shows Nos 1, 2-4 and 12 Birch Polygon as properties that are sub-divided. It does not indicate similar use in properties on Dickenson Road and, had the map been extended, the 'development creep' that has taken place further along the road where all the properties between Birch Polygon and Birch Grove are in flats and apartments. This trend is also evident further west along Dickenson Road and in the wider environs of Birch-in-Rusholme, notably on Brighton Grove, Norman Road and Danes Road (where a recent application for further expansion of an apartment building at no 6 was refused by MCC). There would seem to be little reason to add to the stock of sub-divided properties by converting and extending what is designated a C3 home at no 8 Birch Polygon. The proposal would also have the effect of sandwiching the family home at no 6 between two large sub-divided properties. It also seems very likely that the proposed development with 2 x two-bedroom, 2 x one-bedroom apartments and 1 x three-bedroom apartment would be attractive to students as is the case with similar properties on Dickenson Road and in the wider area. The Application may suggest that the ground floor be for family use but as this cannot be enforced it seems very unlikely that it will be

used in this way.

4) Use of buildings for social care purposes. The map does indicate use of a property on Dickenson Road as sheltered housing but, again, a wider view could have revealed similar social care provision on Birch Grove (no 6), Norman Road and as part of Platt Court and Worsley Court on the corner of Norman Road and Wilmslow Road.

These four features contribute to what could be described as the basis of a mixed and sustainable community.

B. Maintaining a sustainable community using Manchester City Council policies and guidelines

The comments that follow should be read in relation to the following extracts from the "Manchester City Council Core Strategy 2012 to 2027"

"9.24 (H5)....Some land in Central Manchester is of low value or in need of remediation. It is important therefore to ensure that where opportunities arise, higher value development is promoted to encourage a mixed and diverse community by retaining or attracting economically active households to Manchester. " Target Strategy: Proportion of schemes where at least 65% of the units have at least 3 bedrooms "

"9.48 (H11) A sustainable community must provide opportunities for a mix of households. Within this mix families are particularly important because they support a range of local facilities such as schools and tend to have a greater commitment to the neighbourhood as they live there longer than other types of households."

"9.49 The policy above will prevent further loss of Class C3 dwelling houses, which generally provide accommodation for families, to Class C4 HMOs, thus preventing further harm to residential amenity."

No 8 Birch Polygon offers an opportunity identified in the H5 Policy to provide a higher value family home with over three bedrooms.

The point was made clearly in the Planning Inspectorate Report into no 10 Birch Polygon: 'The Council's policies encourage a mixed and diverse community through retaining or attracting economically active households to central Manchester, with an emphasis on increasing the provision of family housing. As a result of my above findings on living conditions, the particular configuration of the appeal proposal does not readily lend itself to being family accommodation, whereas the existing dwelling, while large in size, could. Accordingly, the proposal would result in the loss of a unit that could be suitable for family accommodation.' The same could be said of no 8.

The Planning Inspectorate report does chime with my personal experience of this neighbourhood.

As I see it, Birch in Rusholme is a mixed community with properties that range from family households of various sizes to house-shares to flat conversions to HMOs used by students and others and a variety of social care provision. Many of the family homes are occupied by long-standing residents who have lived in the area for many years and who, as in my case, were encouraged in the 1970s to move to what was then a failing district by City Council home-improvement grants. That initiative was successful - I can identify many others whose attachment to the area has seen them stay, in several cases for even longer than the 41 years I have lived here.

The maintenance and continuation of mixed and diverse communities is a fragile process. Birch in Rusholme has seen a significant development of multiple occupancy dwellings which runs the risk of unbalancing the neighbourhood. Further intensity of multi-occupancy development is likely to alter the population mix with increased risk of "harm to residential amenity". The proposed change of use and development of flats at 8 Birch Polygon will contribute to this process.

C. Other matters arising from the Planning Application

The comments that follow should be read in relation to the following extracts from the "Manchester City Council Core Strategy 2012 to 2027" Policy H 11

'Notwithstanding the policy requirements set out above, all proposals for change of use of existing properties into houses in multiple occupation, and all proposals for conversion of existing properties into flats (which might not necessarily fall within Class C4), would be permitted only where the accommodation to be provided is of a high standard and where it will not materially harm the character of the area, having particular regard to the criteria in policy' DM1.

I would suggest that the following do not meet the 'high standard' required:

- 1) The family apartment is not fit for purpose as a family unit. The layout shows a small dining table with only two chairs inappropriate for family occupation. The garden is small and enclosed and would not be attractive to a family. It certainly would not have served a family well during the coronavirus lockdown.
- 2) Whilst all apartments meet minimum space requirements, they are very much set at a minimum. This raises further questions about the relationship between head space and floor space in the upper apartment.
- 3) MCC's Validation Checklist (2018) states 'The Council at present would only look to 33% of any residential development to be one bedroom units, with the rest being two bedrooms or larger units. This is not being met.
- 4) The single storey rear extension adds 3 metres to the property. As the property has already been extended this would exceed the 3.65m maximum which is noted by Saved UDP Policy DC1.3.
- 5) No attention is given to disabled access either within the apartments or in the car parking space.
- 6) Car parking provision will mean the concreting of front and back soft spaces and will still be under what might be expected of a property with five apartments which can be expected to have a

high level of occupancy.

The UDP Policy DC5.1d states that when considering proposals to convert properties to flats regard will be had to 'avoiding the loss of front gardens and the retention of existing trees and shrubs'. This will not be followed. Immense damage has already been done to the garden area of this property with a number of trees felled, car parking will add to the destruction whilst still being inadequate for the expected need. As a resident whose smaller garden backs on to the property, I am also concerned about noise and pollution from the rear car park

7)The outlook from most of the windows is very poor and could not be described as of a high standard.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the proposed plan runs counter to City Council policy in a number of respects and, steeped in an historical context that owes little to the present day reality of Birch-in-Rusholme, shows little regard for the sensibilities of the many different people who make this area such a lovely place to live.