



Mr Dave Morris
Planning & Regeneration
Manchester City Council
M60 2LA

3 August 2020

Dear Mr Morris

Reference: 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

We are writing to object to this proposal for the following reasons:

1 Loss of family housing

The lawful use of 8 Birch Polygon is a single dwellinghouse. This was established when the application for a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use - Use of the property as a Sui Generis 11 bed House in Multiple Occupation, was refused on 13 May 2020 (ref 126537/LE/2020). A suggestion that this proposal involves conversion of an HMO is refuted by the evidence. If 8 Birch Polygon were converted into flats this change of use would result in the loss of family housing.

Manchester has a clear policy on family housing. Core Strategy Policy H 5, states '*The emphasis will be on **increasing the availability of family housing** and diversifying housing stock in mono-tenure areas, preserving and improving the quality of the existing housing stock and the management of areas where HMOs predominate*'. Similarly, Core Strategy Policy H 11 states '*... In parts of Manchester which do not have a high concentration of HMO/student housing but where the lack of family housing has threatened the sustainability of the community to the extent that regeneration activity with the specific intention of increasing the amount of family housing has taken place, **there will be a presumption against changes of use which would result in the loss of a dwelling which is suitable for a family...***'

The potential loss of family housing and its effect on the sustainability of the community is the principal reason for our objection. We believe that this

proposal conflicts with provision of policies SP1, H1, H5, H11 and DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy (2012), the Guide to Development in Manchester Supplementary Planning Document (2007) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).

The recent decisions on two other proposals to convert single dwellinghouses in the immediate neighbourhood into flats confirm the application of this policy:

1. 10 Birch Polygon Manchester M14 5HX (ie the house next door), Installation of two dormers to front following removal of existing dormer and change of use from single family dwellinghouse to 4no. two-bed self contained flats. This was refused on 4 December 2019. The primary reason was *'the creation of the 4 no. self-contained residential flats would result in the **loss of larger family accommodation, thereby reducing the availability of family housing and undermine the formation of sustainable communities.**'* A subsequent appeal against the above decision was dismissed on 18 March 2020 and *'the loss of a larger family sized dwellinghouse'* was given as a reason.
2. 6 Danes Road Manchester M14 5LD, Change of use from single dwellinghouse to 2no. self-contained flats with associated car parking. This was refused on 24 April 2020. The first reason was *'The creation of two, four bed self-contained residential flats at 6 Danes Road would result in **the loss of family accommodation, thereby reducing the availability of family housing, and undermine the formation of sustainable communities.***

A review of planning appeals reveals that these decisions were consistent with other cases in South Manchester where the conversion of a single dwellinghouse into flats was refused on account of the loss of family accommodation.

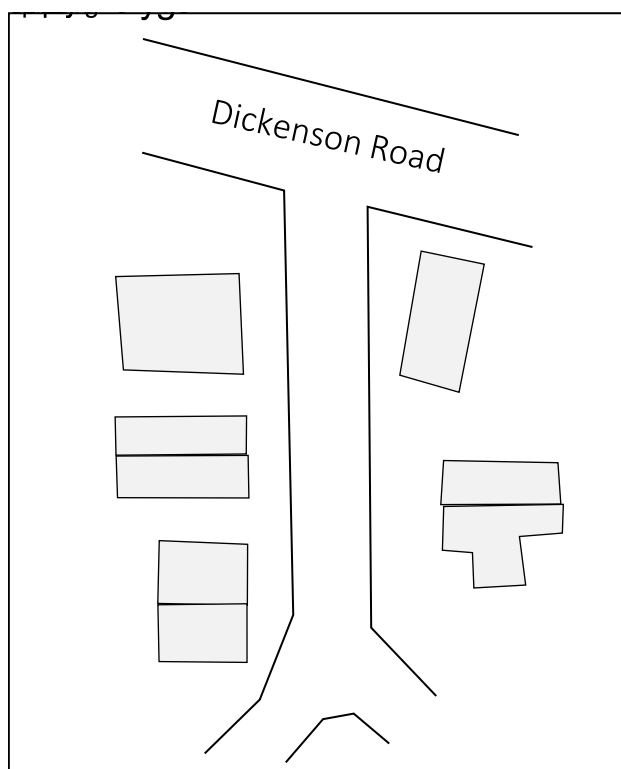
1. 9 Daisy Avenue, Manchester, M13 0LY Conversion of existing three bedroom dwelling to one x 3 bedroom dwelling and one x 1 bedroom dwelling. Appeal dismissed, 10 September 2019.
2. 20 Bosley Avenue, Withington, Manchester M20 1BQ Conversion from dwelling house into 2No. two bedroom selfcontained flats with two storey side and part single storey, part two storey rear extension. Appeal dismissed, 17 May 2017.
3. 9 Oakdene Street, Manchester M9 4NL Retrospective change of use from dwelling house to two one-bedroom flats. Appeal dismissed, 16 August 2016.
4. 91 Palatine Road, Manchester, M20 3JQ Conversion of the existing single dwelling house into four selfcontained flats, and associated external works, provision of car parking spaces, altered access, bin storage and landscaping. Appeal dismissed, 25 May 2016.

The planning application for 8 Birch Polygon suggests that one of the flats, with three bedrooms would be suitable for a family. We do not believe this to be realistic: such a flat would be far more likely to be occupied by a group of students or young professionals. In the plans for this flat the cramped conditions, the small dining table with only two chairs, and the exceptionally small and ungainly shaped 'garden' enclosed by buildings, and high walls and

fences indicate that this flat was not designed for a family. We believe the proposal to be contrary to The Manchester Residential Quality Guidance (2017) which stresses the importance of '*Providing outdoor amenity space that is well located, safe and well-landscaped is necessary in certain types of accommodation, depending on who is living there and over what period of time*'. Most pertinently, we note that very recent proposal to convert the nearby 6 Danes Road Manchester M14 5LD into 2 x **4 bed flats** (ie even more bedrooms per flat) was refused on account of the loss of family housing.

More generally, we understand the flats will be rented and anticipate that they are all likely to be occupied by students or young professionals rather than families. We note Manchester City Council introduced an Article 4 Direction in 2010, which restricts the right convert dwelling houses to HMOs, in order to mitigate the effects of a high concentration of HMOs on facilities, services, residential amenity and social cohesion. Although this proposal is not for HMO accommodation, we believe similar considerations apply here.

The loss of family housing is linked to the provision of high density housing. It is significant that this proposal is **not** within a region of Manchester where high density housing will be supported (Core Strategy Policy H5).



The drawing above shows the current usage of the larger houses that remain on Birch Polygon and the flats on the corner with Dickinson Rd. The gradual conversion of larger houses from family homes in flats or HMOs has inevitably had a cumulative effect on the character and sustainability of the community. If No 8 Birch Polygon was converted into flats then No 6 Birch Polygon, the sole family dwelling that was left, would effectively be surrounded by flats and an HMO. Experience has shown that inner city communities of Manchester, and

other metropolitan areas, made up largely of houses originally lived in by families and then subsequently converted into HMOs, bedsits and small rented flats generally do not thrive.

Yet there is high demand larger family homes in this immediate area. The local Birch Community Centre, the allotments, the strong community spirit and not least the existence of some larger Victorian houses costing considerably less than similar houses in other parts of Manchester, such as Didsbury, Heaton Moor or Chorlton, has made this part of Rusholme very popular for families. We understand that other letters objecting to the planning application will provide further evidence of the high demand for larger family homes in this area. We should like to cite some examples from our own experience.

- The very next street, Birch Grove, is almost entirely comprised of family homes and most of them are larger houses: a simple walk down that street would demonstrate the desirability of the housing there.
- We ourselves managed to buy 6 Birch Polygon only because we were lucky enough to know a family who were thinking of moving out of the area. Otherwise, we do not think we could have found a family home of the size we wanted around here. We even recall unsuccessfully contacting the owners of two HMOs on Birch Grove, one of which was eventually turned back into a family home.
- When 10 and 8 Birch Polygon, both previously owned by Marie Gumuchian, were coming onto the market in the summer of 2018, a family we know (the mother is the manager of Birch Community Centre), who had been looking for a house in the area for a long time, were very keen to buy No 8 Birch Polygon but ultimately were not able to do so because they could not secure a mortgage on a house being sold at auction. (This tale has a happy ending. In July 2020 they finally managed to buy 28 Birch Grove, also previously owned by Marie Gumuchian)

2 The size and quality of the flats

The application claims that the proposal would 'provide a high quality living environment for the future occupants'. We do not believe this to be the case.

The flats are very small. Two of the flats, namely Apartment 2 (3 bed, 74sqm) and Apartment 4 (2 bed, 31 sqm), are the minimum permitted size (see Nationally Described Space Standard, 2105). Two more, Apartment 1 (1 bed, 39 sqm) and Apartment 3 (1 bed, 39 sqm), exceed the minimum permitted size by a mere 2 sqm. The fifth flat, Apartment 5 (2 bed, 69 sqm), which has a little more floor space, has sloping ceilings and restricted headroom which does not appear to have been included in the calculations.

40% of the development, ie 2 of 5 flats, comprises one bed units. This conflicts with Manchester City Council's Validation Checklist, 2018, which restricts residential development to a maximum of 33% being one bedroom units.

The daylight and outlook for bedrooms in Apartments 2 and 4 is very poor as they look out onto a narrow passageway. The kitchen area of Apartment 4 looks out onto the bin store. The bedroom and living room of Apartment 3 look directly out on to the car parking spaces which are right next to the building. Finally, a number of rooms on the side elevation look out onto the gable wall of 10 Birch Polygon. For these reasons we believe there is a conflict with policies SP1 and DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy (2012) and with policies DC5.1 and DC7a.1 of the Saved Policies of the UDP for Manchester (1995).

Although this not primarily a planning issue, we have some concerns about fire safety. There are the remains of a fire balcony on the top floor of the building. But there is no mention in the proposal of any precautions that may be needed to ensure the safety of the residents of Apartment 5 on the second floor.

3 The length of the extension

The rear of 8 Birch Polygon has already been extended on two floors by 2.2 m. The additional proposed single floor extension is 3 m deep. This would bring the total extended distance to 5.2 m in places. This exceeds the 3.65 m maximum which is permitted in policy DC1.3 of the Saved Policies of the UDP for Manchester.

4 The lack of disabled access

The proposal appears to have taken no account of the need to provide disabled access. There is no level access to the ground floor flats which are reached by 4 steps 0.66 m high, nor is there a lift in the building. Furthermore, as the flats on the ground and first floor are at or only slightly larger than the minimum permitted size there is insufficient room to manoeuvre a wheelchair even if one could be brought into the building. Manchester City Council's Validation Checklist, 2018, requires that at least 10% of residential units need to be DDA compliant. Consequently, there is a conflict with Policy DM1 of the Core Strategy and Policies DC5.1 and DC7.1 of the Saved Policies of the UDP for Manchester.

5 The car parking and arrangement of the site

The earlier planning proposal, that was withdrawn, had parking spaces for 6 cars at the rear of the building. This proposal has spaces for 5 cars: 2 spaces at the front and 3 at the rear. The spaces at the front are very tight especially as they need to include room for cars to pass to the rear of the building. This leaves virtually no room for flower beds or other greenery at the front of the building. We believe this conflicts with Policy DC5.1d of the Saved Policies of the UDP for Manchester which promotes '*avoiding the loss of front gardens and the retention of existing trees and shrubs*'.

The car parking spaces, manoeuvring space and lengthy driveway together take up considerably more than 50% of the garden space at the side and rear of the building. The spaces are hard up against the boundary wall of No 6 Birch Polygon. This seems particularly unreasonable as No 6 is a family home whose garden would be sandwiched between the existing car park for the flats at 2-4 Birch Polygon and the proposed car park for the flats at 8 Birch Polygon. The car parking would also have a detrimental effect on the adjoining gardens on Birch Grove. Prior to the purchase of 8 Birch Polygon by the present owners in 2019, the area to rear of the building was a mature, if somewhat overgrown, garden. Since then all the trees, shrubs and other vegetation have been cut down from both 8 and 10 Birch Polygon. We believe that this strongly conflicts with sections 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework, 2019, which says that **development should deliver a net gain in biodiversity.**

We believe that the proposed car parking is contrary to the Core Development Principles set out in the Core Strategy for Manchester which states that 'Developments in all parts of the City should ... **protect and enhance the built and natural environment.**'

There is another issue with the car parking. The long narrow driveway required to access the car parking spaces at the rear would leave very little space on either side. There is no room for a pedestrian and a car at the same time and this is a safety risk.

We have already commented on how small the private space for Apartment 2 is. The communal space for the four remaining flats is small too as car parking dominates the garden; it is also inaccessible being a very long way from the flats it serves. Experience shows that arrangements like this rarely get used in the manner intended.

The proposed cycle storage in the basement is well intentioned but impractical. The tight, steep staircase and right angle corner are almost impossible to negotiate with a bicycle. We know this from bitter experience and have had to build cycle storage at ground level.

Summary

The primary reason we are objecting to this proposal is because it would result in the loss of family housing. The other issues – the quality and size of the flats, the extension, the accessibility and the car parking – are important in their own right. But we believe they are essentially a consequence of the proposal to covert a single dwellinghouse into flats.

Thank you for considering this objection.

Yours sincerely

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References

Core Strategy for Manchester (2012)

Guide to Development in Manchester Supplementary Planning Document (2007)

Manchester City Council, Article 4 Direction (2010)

Manchester City Council, Planning Validation Checklist (2018)

Manchester City Council, 10 Birch Polygon M14 5HX, Refusal of Planning Application (December 2019)

Manchester City Council, 6 Danes Road M14 5LD, Refusal of Planning Application (April 2020)

Manchester City Council, 8 Birch Polygon M14 5HX, Refusal of Application for Certificate of Lawful Use as an HMO (May 2020)

Manchester Residential Quality Guidance (2017)

Nationally Described Space Standard, 2105

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

Planning Inspectorate, 91 Palatine M20 3JQ, Dismissal of Appeal (May 2016)

Planning Inspectorate, 9 Oakdene Street M20 3JQ, Dismissal of Appeal (August 2016)

Planning Inspectorate, 20 Bosley Avenue Manchester M20 1BQ, Dismissal of Appeal (May 2017)

Planning Inspectorate, 9 Daisy Avenue M13 0LY, Dismissal of Appeal (September 2019)

Planning Inspectorate, 10 Birch Polygon M14 5HX Dismissal of Appeal (March 2020)

Saved Policies of the Unitary Development Plan for Manchester (1995)