

TILEHURST 12/02906 Pins Ref 2202965	74 – 104 Starlings Drive, Tilehurst Compton Developments Ltd	Provision of additional floor to accommodate 2 flat units to each of 4 no. existing detached blocks.	Delegated Refusal	Dismissed 24.2.14
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The outline application for the erection of an additional floor on each of the four identified blocks of flats in Starlings Drive, Tilehurst was refused on 6th February 2013. Concern was had with the impact of a further storey on the character of the area, the impact on protected trees, the means of parking when considering the tree protection, and the lack of a S106 agreement. During the course of the appeal the appellant provided information in relation to the impact on protected trees, which overcame the reason for refusal on trees. A unilateral undertaking was also completed which overcame the reason for refusal on the lack of a S106. The parking could be dealt with by condition.

In dismissing the appeal the Inspector considered the character of the area. There are several groups of blocks of flats in the area, with a variety of rooflines owing in part to the position in the valley. The flats are mostly in blocks three stories tall. The area is quite spacious, despite being in a steeply sided valley. The appeal site lies opposite to two storey houses front and back, and next to three storey houses and flats to the sides. There are open views from Magpie Way, and from this vantage point it is clear that the flats on the appeal site have been cut into the hillside. There are a number of mature trees which add character to the surroundings.

Despite the difference in heights and larger mass of the blocks of flats the area has a pleasing conformity of design which has taken advantage of the sloping terrain to create a surprisingly consistent feel as flats sit comfortably with adjacent houses. Views across the roofs of the flats are significant as they make an important contribution to the sense of space and openness.

The addition of a fourth floor to four blocks of flats would have a small effect on each of the characteristics of the area which cumulatively would add up to serious harm. The fourth floor would upset the balance and look out of place. They would particularly dominate the smaller houses across the road. They would present a much greater mass to the houses in Magpie Way become more dominant in views across the valley. They would also stand out in longer views down the valley from further north along Starlings Drive. Overall, the proposal would compromise the harmony of design in the estate.

It is accepted that 8 new flats would be a valuable addition to the housing stock and the proposal makes good use of land, though the NPPF identifies three strands to sustainability, one of which is a social role of 'creating a high quality environment'. As it is not considered that the proposal would create a high quality environment but causes significant harm which is not outweighed by the benefits it follows that the proposal is not sustainable.