

DELEGATED PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Norcot

App Ref: 230120

Address: 5 Stoneham Close, Reading, RG30 4HB

Proposals: Outline application for the demolition of existing garage and erection of two houses

Case Officer: Tom Bradfield

Date received (valid from): 03/03/2023 Target Decision date: 28/04/2023

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

Site visit date: 05/04/2023

The site forms part of the garden of number 5 Stoneham Close. It contains a single garage, but is otherwise open land. To the north is 5 Stoneham Close, a semi-detached property with some garden remaining to the rear. To the west is the rear garden of number 7 Stoneham Close, to the east is Stoneham Close, with number 87 beyond and to the south is a substation and the rear garden of number 81 Cockney Hill, with the property beyond. The site faces onto Stoneham Close to the east.

The site has no allocations or designations in the Local Plan.

2. PROPOSAL

The application seeks to demolish the existing structures on the site and erect a pair of semi-detached two bedroom houses. This is an Outline Planning Application, the only matter being reserved is the access.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

211184	Outline application considering appearance, layout and scale for the construction of a two storey building for 1 x 1, 1 x 2 and 1 x 3 bedroom flats with a mansard roof on land to the rear of 5 Stoneham Close
	Withdrawn 13/12/2021
220943	Outline application for a 1 storey building creating 2 x dwellings with mansard roof, with appearance, layout and scale to be considered (access and landscaping reserved for future consideration)
	Withdrawn 09/09/2022

4. CONSULTATIONS

Fourteen adjacent addresses were consulted by letter.

Twenty letters of representation have been received and raised the following concerns:

- The application is factually inaccurate
- Unsafe parking and access arrangements
- Insufficient parking
- Cramped and out of character
- Loss of light to neighbours
- Overbearing to neighbours

- Loss of privacy to neighbours
- Loss of natural habitat
- Lack of amenity space for future residents
- Low quality of accommodation for future residents
- Lack of waste and recycling storage

Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC1: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM
CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY
EN12: BIODIVERSITY AND THE GREEN NETWORK
EN14: TREES, HEDGES AND WOODLAND
H1: PROVISION OF HOUSING
H2: DENSITY AND MIX
H3: AFFORDABLE HOUSING
H5: STANDARDS FOR NEW HOUSING
H10: PRIVATE AND COMMUNAL OUTDOOR SPACE
H11: DEVELOPMENT OF PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL GARDENS
TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS
TR5: CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

SPG/SPD

Affordable Housing (2021)
Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)

APPRAISAL

Principle

Policy H11 of the Local Plan requires proposal which seek to develop on private residential gardens to make a positive contribution to the character of the area in terms of:

- The relationship of the existing built form and spaces around buildings within the surrounding area;
- A layout which integrates with the surrounding area with regard to the built up coverage of each plot, building line(s), rhythm of plot frontages, parking areas, and existing pattern of openings and boundary treatments on the site frontage;
- Providing appropriate hard and soft landscaping, particularly at site boundaries. This includes features such as the variety of trees, hardstanding/lawns and hedges, etc;
- Compatibility with the general building height within the surrounding area;
- The materials and elevational detail. These should be high quality, and where appropriate distinctive and/ or complementary;
- The arrangement of doors, windows and other principal architectural features and their rhythm between buildings.

Furthermore, the policy requires proposals to provide a site of adequate size to accommodate the development proposed in terms of setting and spacing around buildings, amenity space, landscaping and space for access roads and parking. Proposals should also include access which meets appropriate standards, avoid tandem development, minimise exposure of private boundaries to public areas, not have a detrimental impact to the amenity of adjacent and nearby occupants, have an emphasis on the provision of family-sized housing, provide biodiversity net gain where possible and not prejudice development of a wider area.

Many of the above criteria fall across several policy areas, but are tied together by Policy H11. Given the breadth of issues Policy H11 covers, the assessment below covers all matters relating to the proposals and makes an assessment of the acceptability in principle in the conclusion.

Character and Appearance

Local Plan Policy CC7 seeks to ensure that all development must be of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area, in particular relating to layout, urban structure/grain, landscaping, density, mix, scale, height, massing, architectural detailing and materials.

Stoneham Close is accessed via Cockney Hill, and forms a loop at the end of an access part of the road. The proposal site faces east onto the access part of Stoneham Close. No other properties face directly onto this part of Stoneham Close. On Stoneham Close itself, the properties tend to be semi-detached with generous gardens and spacing between properties, both to the side and rear. To the south of the site on Cockney Hill, the properties tend to be larger detached properties with large gardens and spaces between houses.

The proposal would create a pair of semi-detached properties between the rear of number 5 and a substation to the south. The boundary walls of the proposed properties would abut both the substation and the garden fence to the north, with no spacing between the adjacent sites. The proposals would appear cramped within their site and would not be in keeping with the prevailing pattern of development in the surrounding area. The lack of spacing between the proposals and the adjoining boundaries would result in the houses appearing forced into the space, and would not represent a natural continuation of the built form in this area, failing to integrate in an acceptable manner into the urban grain.

The design of the proposals includes roof dormers on the front elevation and a form of mansard roof. Whilst there are examples of front dormers on other properties in the area, the overall design of the houses would not be considered of a high quality as required by Policy CC7. The appearance would not relate well to the street scene, and would introduce significant built form to an area of the street where there is currently very little. This is exacerbated by the cramped nature of the site. The houses would not be in keeping with the surrounding development and would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area.

Neighbour's Living Conditions

Local Plan Policy CC8 requires development to not cause a detrimental impact on the living conditions of existing residential properties, or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties.

The site is on a slope which descends from the top of this part of Stoneham Close down to Cockney Hill. It is at a lower elevation than numbers 5 and 7 Stoneham Close, and a higher elevation than number 81 Cockney Hill.

The side elevation of the proposal is within 6.3m of the rear facing habitable room windows at number 5, and extends at least 2.7m above the fence height for over half of the width of the garden at number 5. Given the scale and proximity of the proposal, it is considered that this would result in an unacceptable level of overbearing, an increased sense of enclosure and a loss of outlook. The proximity of the two proposed parking spaces to the garden of number 5 would also result in some increased noise and disturbance to the existing residents, further eroding the quality of the existing amenity space. The proposal would result in harm to the living conditions of the existing residents at number 5.

The rear of the proposed houses faces towards the garden of number 4 Stoneham Close. Given there are no habitable upper floor windows facing in this direction, and the proposed building is set off the boundary by 3.6m, it is not considered that there would be any significant harm to the living conditions at number 4. The proposed building would be set 21m away from the rear of number 81 Cockney Hill and does not abut the boundary. It is not considered that there would be any significant harm to the living conditions of the existing residents at number 81.

Quality of Accommodation

Local Plan Policy H5 requires new building housing to meet certain standards in terms of floorspace, sustainability targets and accessibility targets. Local Plan Policy H10 requires houses to be provided with functional private amenity space which reflects the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity. For houses, the policy suggests that useable private outdoor space should be no less than the gross floor area of the dwelling to which it relates.

For properties of this type (two bedroom, three person, two storey houses), the Nationally Described Space Standards require a minimum of 70sqm internal floorspace. There appears to be a discrepancy between the plans and design & access statement with regards to floor areas, however, both unit 5A (70.8sqm) and 5B (71.8sqm) meet this requirement. The Standards also set out requirements for bedroom sizes, among other criteria. Section 10(c) requires single bedrooms to be at least 7.5sqm and be at least 2.15m wide. Neither property meets this requirement with regards bedroom 2. In 5A, bedroom 2 is 6.78sqm in area and 2.1m wide, in 5B bedroom 2 is 6.62sqm in area and 2.05m wide. Given this, the proposals would not meet the relevant floorspace standards for houses of this type.

Unit 5A would have a garden of 19sqm in area and unit 5B would have a garden of 51sqm in area. Number 5 Stoneham Close would have a garden of 48sqm, which is a reduction from the 300sqm it previously enjoyed. Given the suggested garden space provision in the policy, both of the proposed units and the existing house would fall below that threshold as a result of the proposals. The garden of unit 5A would fall significantly below this, and its unusable nature would be exacerbated by the proximity to the upper floor windows at number 5, which look directly over the garden, which is made worse due to the change in levels, resulting in a cramped space which would lack a basic level of privacy. Given the nature of the surrounding area, with the majority of the houses enjoying large garden spaces, the proposal results in both poor quality garden space for the proposed units as well as impacting on the quality of the garden space for the existing property at number 5.

The proposal would provide cramped, sub-standard accommodation which would fail to meet internal and external space standards. The living conditions for existing and future occupants would be unacceptable.

Transport

Policy TR5 requires development to provide car and cycle parking appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough. It also requires development to ensure safe access for pedestrians and vehicles and to ensure that there is no adverse impact on the safe and efficient operation of the highway. The site is located in Zone 3, Secondary Core Area and the parking requirement in this zone is 1.5 spaces per 2 bedroom house. Any loss of parking associated with the main dwelling (5 Stoneham Close) must also be re-provided for.

This application is an outline application with access as a reserved matter. It is not clear why this approach has been taken, especially given that there is an existing access onto the site which would be lost to facilitate the new houses. Given the constrained nature of the site and the fact that the proposals show where the access would have to be for the scheme to function, it is considered that it can be assessed as part of the proposals.

The proposed ground floor plan illustrates a total of 3 car parking spaces, which meets the requirements for the new dwellings. However, any loss of parking associated with the main dwelling (5 Stoneham Close) must be re-provided for to ensure that enough parking is provided so that there is not a knock-on effect on the safety and function of the highway through on-street parking. The plans indicate that a new parking area to front of 5 Stoneham Close will provide two parking spaces for the existing dwelling. However, it is unclear how the parking space will be accessed without overrunning the footway or securing access via the neighbouring driveway who has objected to the proposal. Given this, it is not possible to determine whether safe access/egress from the proposed parking spaces associated with the existing dwelling can be achieved.

There is an existing dropped kerb on Stoneham Close which provides access to the garage currently associated with the main dwelling. It is assumed a new dropped kerb will be introduced further north to facilitate the two adjacent parking spaces. However, the location and width of the proposed access(es) have not been illustrated on the site plan. Any modifications to the existing access points must be illustrated to ensure that a suitable layout and sufficient junction spacing is maintained.

In accordance with the adopted Parking SPD, the development is required to provide a minimum of 1 cycle parking spaces for each house. No details have been submitted for and given the constrained nature of the site, it is not clear how a secure store would be provided within the site with direct access to the highway.

The proposal fails to demonstrate how parking spaces would be provided for the existing occupiers, and fails to demonstrate how safe access and egress from the site would be secured.

Ecology & Biodiversity

Local Plan Policy EN12 states that development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity, and should provide a net gain wherever possible.

The applicant has submitted a Preliminary Ecology Assessment as part of the application. This demonstrates that there would be no adverse impact to species on the site.

The report states that the development would lead to a Biodiversity Net Gain on the site, but does not elaborate on how this would be achieved, beyond the planting of several small trees in an area of land approximately 5m in length, without any further detail. No BNG spreadsheets, plans, management plans, habitat assessment sheets or planting details have been provided. Given the lack of information, the proposal has failed to demonstrate that it would meet the requirements of Policy EN12.

Affordable Housing

Local Plan Policy H3 seeks to ensure that residential development makes an appropriate contribution to the affordable housing needs of Reading. For sites of 1-4 dwellings, a financial contribution will be made that will enable the equivalent to 10% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough.

The applicant has indicated that they are willing to meet the policy requirements for a financial contribution. No legal agreement has been entered into given the other issues with the proposals.

Housing Mix

Local Plan Policy H2 identifies that there is a significant need for family housing across the Borough. Policy H11 states that development on garden land should have an emphasis towards the provision of family housing.

The proposal would provide two sub-standard two bedroom houses with inadequate internal and external space. Given this, it is not considered that the proposals would constitute family housing, and so would fail to meet this aim of Policy H11.

Conclusion

The proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area through the creation of a cramped and inappropriate pair of houses. It would cause harm to neighbour's living conditions through loss of outlook, creation of a sense of enclosure and an overbearing presence in close proximity to the boundary. The living conditions of future occupants would be compromised given the poor quality of both internal and external space. Furthermore, the proposal fails to demonstrate an appropriate parking and access arrangement as well as failing to demonstrate that there would be no net loss of biodiversity. Given the significant issues with the proposals, they would also conflict with Policy H11, and are therefore considered unacceptable in principle.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSAL - for the following reasons:

1. The proposal would fail to make a positive contribution to the character of the area through an inappropriate layout, cramped appearance and inappropriate design which would fail to adequately integrate into the urban grain of the area, thereby causing significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would therefore fail to comply with Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 Policies H11 (Development of Private Residential Gardens) and CC7 (Design and the Public Realm) and the NPPF.
2. The proposal would result in significant harm to the living conditions of the neighbouring properties through loss of outlook, the creation of an unacceptable sense of enclosure and an overbearing presence on the boundary. The proposal would therefore fail to comply with Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 Policies H11 (Development of Private Residential Gardens) and CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity) and the NPPF.
3. The proposal would fail to provide an acceptable standard of living accommodation for future residents due to the sub-standard bedroom floorspace provision in both units and inappropriate, cramped and overlooked private amenity space. Furthermore, the proposal would result in a significant reduction in garden space at the existing property, resulting in harm to the quality of living accommodation at number 5 Stoneham Close. The proposal would therefore fail to comply with Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 Policies H5 (Standards for New Housing) and H11 (Development of Private Residential Gardens) and the NPPF.
4. The proposal fails to demonstrate that it would provide safe and appropriate parking and access arrangements for both the proposed houses and the existing property. This would adversely affect road safety and the free flow of traffic on the surrounding highways. The proposal would therefore fail to comply with Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 Policies TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters) and TR5 (Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging) and the NPPF.
5. The proposal fails to demonstrate that it would not result in a net loss of biodiversity and fails to show that it would result in a Biodiversity Net Gain. The proposal would therefore fail to comply with Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) and the NPPF.
6. In the absence of a completed legal agreement to secure provision of a financial contribution in lieu of on-site affordable housing, the proposals fails to adequately contribute to the housing needs of the Reading Borough thereby failing to comply with policy H3 (Affordable Housing) of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019, Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document 2021, Planning Obligations Under Section 106 Supplementary Planning Document 2015 and the NPPF.

Informatives:

1. In determining this application, the Local Planning Authority took into consideration the following plans and documents:

100.P.01C, 100.ELP.02B, 100.P.04B, 100.SPA.06.C, 500.SBPE.01, 500.SBPP.03B, 200.AP4, 1250.LP.6, Ecology report Pro Vision ecology, Arboriculture impact report. Bucks Plant Care, Sustainable construction notes FDF Architecture

2. The Local Planning Authority has worked positively and proactively with the applicant to see if relevant concerns could be resolved to allow permission to be granted. However, that has not been possible within the prescribed target or agreed extended timescale and therefore the decision to refuse planning permission has been taken. No pre-application advice was sought on this proposal. Using the Council's advice service can result in the avoidance of refusal of planning applications.
3. Without prejudice to any future application or appeal, the applicant is advised that reason for refusal 4 could be overcome by entering into a Section 106 Legal Agreement.
4. The applicant is advised that the refused scheme, had it been able to be approved, would have been a CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) liable development.