

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Norcot

App Ref: 211986/FUL

Address: 36a Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SF

Proposals: Conversion of loft space with front and rear dormers to form additional bedroom and bathroom

Case Officer: Mr David Brett

Applicant: Mr P Chance

Date received: 09/12/2021

Valid from: 21/12/2021

Target Decision date: 15/02/2022

1. INTRODUCTION

The proposal site is a two-storey semi-detached dwelling on Wantage Road, Norcot Ward. The surrounding area is characterised as predominately residential with Victorian terraced rows and semi-detached dwellings. Oxford Road is to the north of the application site, with Wilson Primary School 50m west of the application site.

The application site is subject to a Certificate of Lawfulness (Existing) application for the division of the property as two self-contained flats. Therefore, the proposed development is sought under a Full Planning Application rather than a Householder Application. As a result, 36 Wantage Road is not afforded permitted development rights. Further details of the Certificate of Lawfulness (Existing) application can be found in section 3 of this report.

An Article 4 directive is in place for 4-34 Wantage Road (even numbers only), concerning the patterned brickwork to these properties. As such, the application site is outside the Article 4 area.

An unaccompanied site visit was performed on 27/01/2022.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The proposed development seeks a loft conversion with box dormers to the front and rear roof slopes. The proposed dormers are identical to the existing front and rear dormers at adjoining property 38 Wantage Road, for which there is no planning history associated with these dormers.

The dormer proposed to the front roof slope is a flat roof box dormer, with hanging slate tiles to cheeks and front elevation. The dormer proposed to the rear roof slope is a flat roof box dormer also consists of hanging slate tiles to the cheeks and rear elevation. The application form states that the windows to the proposed dormers will be white uPVC. It is also proposed that the front and rear chimney stacks be removed to facilitate the proposed dormers. The chimneys are to be replaced with slate to match the existing roof slopes.

Plans considered:

- Location Plan
- Plans and Elevations Existing and Proposed for the Conversion of the Loft Space, Comprising Bedroom and Bathroom - WR/PL/04

Received on 09/12/2021

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

36 Wantage Road

211881/CLE - Certificate of lawfulness for the division of the original semi-detached house (no.36) into two separate flats now 36A and 36B Wantage Road - Application to be determined.

4. CONSULTATIONS

4.1 The following addresses were consulted by letter.

34 Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SF - Response received on 25/01/2022

- No objection.

36b Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SF - No response received.

38 Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SF - No response received.

1a Wilson Road, Reading, RG30 2RS - No response received.

3a Wilson Road, Reading, RG30 2RS - No response received.

A site notice was erected on Wednesday 5th January 2022 for a period of 21 days, expiring on Wednesday 26th January 2022. Responses to the application were received from the following (as summarised):

41 Wantage Road, Reading, RG30 2SN - Response received on 08/02/2022

- The neighbour objects to the roof extensions as they would mirror the existing extensions to the neighbouring property (number 38).
- *"Wantage Road contains a mix of Victorian and more modern housing. What is an attractive street with interesting architectural features is being destroyed by these kinds of development which are completely unsympathetic to the buildings they occupy."*
- The neighbour considers the proposed extensions would have a detrimental impact on the street scene, with architectural features being destroyed.
- The neighbour considers the proposed extensions are not sympathetic to the character and appearance of the existing building and the surrounding area.
- *"The proposed development will significantly alter an attractive Victorian semi-detached building by adding a box on the top of it and removing the chimney stack."*
- The neighbour considers the proposed extensions to be contrary to Policy H9 (House Extensions and Ancillary Accommodation) of the Reading Borough Local Plan.
- The comments received from number 41 also make reference to Policies H5 (Standards for New Housing) and H8 (Residential Conversions) of the Reading Borough Local Plan. This is concerning the size of the resultant floor space. The application form states that no additional flats are to be provided, with the proposed extensions to serve an existing flat. The application does not seek a residential conversion and is therefore not subject to the requirements of Policies H5 and H8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

5. 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.

6. 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

National Planning Policy Framework

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (Adopted November 2019)

CC7 Design and the Public Realm

CC8 Safeguarding Amenity

SPG/SPD

Design Guide to House Extensions SPD (Adopted March 2021)

7. APPRAISAL

7.1 Design and the Public Realm

In accordance with Reading Borough Local Plan policy CC7: Design and the Public Realm, development will be assessed to ensure that it (amongst other matters):

- *Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm;*
- *Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping*

In accordance with Reading Borough Local Plan policy H9: House Extensions and Ancillary Accommodation, house extension proposals are acceptable where it:

- *Respects the character and appearance of the house in terms of scale and locations.*
- *Respects the character and pattern of neighbouring properties and appearance of the street as a whole in terms of scale, location, materials and design, the arrangement of doors, windows and other principal architectural features and any important existing building line.*

The surrounding area is characterised as Victorian terraced rows and semi-detached pairs. An Article 4 directive is in place for 4-34 Wantage Road (even numbers only), concerning the patterned brickwork to these properties. The buildings identified under the Article 4 directive along Wantage Road is one of 14 other Article 4 directions in Reading that remove all permitted development rights including extensions and other permitted works related to areas notable for patterned brickwork and other features. As a result, the dwellings directly north of the application site remain largely unaltered in terms of their external appearance when viewed from the Highway.



Fig 1. Google Maps image of Wantage Road, proposal site outlined in red. Image retrieved from Google Maps on 09/02/2022

The flat roof box dormer proposed to the front roof slope of 36 Wantage Road is not considered acceptable due to the size and scale of the dormer in its dominance of the roof slope. The inappropriate size and scale of the proposed front dormer is further apparent by the need to remove the chimney stack, which in this case is considered integral to the Victorian character of the dwelling.

It is acknowledged that the proposed box dormer to the front roof slope is set from the eaves by 0.65m, however, the overall size and scale of the front dormer is considered to dominate the front roof slope and detract from the character and appearance of the dwelling.

As existing, there is a box dormer to the front roof slope of 38 Wantage Road (for which there is no planning history) - the other half of the semi-detached pair of 36 and 38. It appears from Google Street View that the substantial completion of the existing front box dormer to number 38 took place more than 4 years prior to the date that this planning application was submitted. The front dormer to number 38 is therefore immune from enforcement action as set out in section 171B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.



Fig 2. Google Street View image Captured in June 2009 demonstrating front dormer to 38 Wantage Road.



Fig 3. Site photo taken by Case Officer on 27/01/2022.

In accordance with paragraph 6.4.3 of the Design Guide to House Extensions SPD; “Simply copying a poor to mediocre existing style is not considered good design, development should always contribute positively or enhance existing areas”. The existing box dormer to number 38 is considered out of character with the frontage of other properties along Wantage Road and is in no way representative of the street as a whole. Dwellings along Wantage Road, particularly north of the proposal site, feature characterful pitched roof dormers to the front roof slopes. The dwellings to the south of the application site on both sites of Wantage Road largely do not feature front dormer extensions.



Fig 4. Proposal site and 4-34 Wantage Road (even numbers only) to the north. Site photo taken by Case Officer on 27/01/2022.

It was recommended to the agent that the design of the proposed dormers be revised from box dormers to pitched roof dormers to more appropriately reflect the character and appearance of the surrounding area. Further guidance on dormer extensions was provided to the agent in respect to paragraph 7.3 of the Design Guide to House Extensions SPD. The agent declined to revise the plans submitted, stating that design solution presented is necessary/justified due to the existing front dormer to number 38. The agent further stated that the solution presented would result in better form and geometry than that of a pitched roof dormer design. It is considered that allowing the proposed dormers would result in the semi-detached pair appearing top heavy and at odds with the prevailing character and appearance of the surrounding area.

It was encouraged by the agent that the design be assessed on its own merits. As per paragraph 7.3.5 of the Design Guide to House Extensions SPD, all dormer styles are considered on a case by case basis in relation to the character and appearance of the existing dwelling and surrounding area. In this specific instance, it is considered that flat roof front box dormers are not considered characteristic of the surrounding area, with the existing front dormer to number 38 being the outlier. On its own merits, the proposed front dormer is considered overly large and dominant of the existing front roof slope to 36 Wantage Road and within the wider Wantage Road area. Allowing the proposed design would exacerbate the harm already caused by number 38 in the wider streetscene.

Turning to the dormer proposed to the rear roof slope, the situation is similar to that of the dormer proposed to the front elevation, however, it is acknowledged that this dormer would be largely obscured from the street scene. Nevertheless, the excessive size and scale of the proposed box dormer would result in the loss of a chimney stack. The proposed box dormer to the rear roof slope is set from the eaves by 0.36m, however, the overall size and scale of the rear dormer dominating the rear roof slope is considered excessive in size and scale, especially when combined with the dormer proposed to the front roof slope.

In accordance with Policy H9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, the proposed dormers are not considered to respect the character and pattern of neighbouring properties and appearance of the street as a whole in terms of scale, location and design. The dormers combined are considered to dominate the existing roof slope and when combined with the existing dormers at number 38 would result in an overdeveloped roof slope to the semi-detached pair of 36 and 38. In this instance it is considered that reinstating symmetry to the semi-detached pair of 38 and 38 Wantage Road is not acceptable when replicating poor design. Therefore, the proposed development is not

considered in accordance with Policies CC7 and H9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, as well as the guidance within the Design Guide to House Extensions SPD.

7.2 Safeguarding Amenity

This proposal has also been assessed against Reading Borough Local Plan policy CC8: Safeguarding Amenity, which states that proposals are acceptable where they will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties with regard to factors including:

- *Privacy and overlooking*
- *Access to sunlight and daylight*
- *Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development*
- *Harm to outlook*

Due to the nature of the development proposed, it is not considered that the development would result in a loss of privacy to neighbouring residents, harmful loss of light or any other criteria listed under Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

It is considered that the proposed dormers would improve the living conditions at 36a Wantage Road, utilising the loft as habitable space. Proposed section drawings, or drawings demonstrating the finished floor and ceiling levels have not been submitted to confirm that there would be appropriate height space in the converted loft. As the proposed dormers appear identical to the existing dormers at number 38 it is considered likely that resultant height in the converted loft would be adequate.

The considered shortcomings in the design of the proposed front and rear dormers is discussed in the preceding section of this report. The dormer proposed to the front elevation is considered harmful to the character and appearance of the street scene along Wantage Road, however, the development is not considered to harm the living conditions of neighbouring residents or residents of 36 Wantage Road.

Overall, the proposed development is not considered harmful to the living conditions of neighbouring properties or residents of 36 Wantage Road and is therefore considered in accordance with Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan.

8. CONCLUSION

Overall, when applying a planning balance, the design shortfalls are considered to outweigh the proposals being acceptable in amenity terms and any other planning benefits, such as providing additional residential accommodation. The proposed development is not considered subservient to the existing dwelling, or contribute positively to the character and appearance of the existing surrounding area. This is due to the size, scale and design of the proposed dormers. If a revised project is put forward for the site, it would be expected that the design of the dormers be revised, to respect the character and appearance of the existing dwelling and the surrounding area in line with policy and SPD guidance.

Officers did advise the agent of these shortcomings and this conclusion. The agent was provided with an opportunity to withdraw the application prior to a decision being made, but this was not forthcoming (also acknowledging the right to appeal). Hence the above conclusion reached on the application, on the basis of the information submitted and consideration of all material matters.

Permission refused due to the following reasons:

1. The proposed front and rear dormer extensions, by way of their size, scale, design and lack of subservience, are not considered to suitably integrate with the proportions of the original property and the proposed front dormer would be a detrimental addition to the street scene. As such, the proposal is considered contrary to Policies CC7 and H9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (Adopted November 2019) and the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance 'Design Guide to House Extensions SPD' (Adopted March 2021)

9. RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE

10. INFORMATIVES

IF0: Positive and Proactive Working - refusal

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 agreed extended timescale and therefore the decision to refuse planning permission has been taken.

C00: Plans Considered

The refusal relates only to the following plans and information as received by the local planning authority:

Plans considered:

- Location Plan
- Plans and Elevations Existing and Proposed for the Conversion of the Loft Space, Comprising Bedroom and Bathroom - WR/PL/04

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I14: Pre-app Advice

This planning application was submitted without the benefit of first seeking pre-application advice from the Local Planning Authority, which can often result in the avoidance of refusal of planning permission. Please see the following link to the Council's pre-application service here:

http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/1190/Pre-Application-Enquiry-Form/pdf/Pre-app_Nov_2016.pdf