

27-29 Gravel Hill, Emmer Green, Reading

Planning Statement

Introduction

This statement accompanies a planning application for a proposal to erect 2 No. detached family sized houses including car ports following the demolition of the existing dwelling.

Accompanying plans / drawings;

- Location map
- Topographic survey plan
- Block / Site layout plan
- Proposed Floor plans, elevations and building sections
- Site Sections
- Street Elevation
- Ecological survey report
- Arboricultural report
- CGI illustrations

Site Description

The site covers an area of 0.2 Ha, with a narrowing frontage and rises towards the N/E. The N/E corner is elevated by approx. 7 metres in relation to the highway. A bungalow occupies the Eastern portion of the site, accessed via a driveway off Gravel Hill to the S/E corner. The gardens of Highdown Avenue back on to the site, with Reading Golf Club beyond to the N/W. Opposite the site is the highway entrance to Merthyr Vale. Adjacent, to the East is No. 25, a 2 storey house. To the West is a bungalow, No. 29. A 6 metre easement strip extends centrally through the site, accommodating a rising main.

The site has been cleared prior to sale to the Applicants, albeit with hedges and trees retained along the boundaries.

Area Character Appraisal

The site is located within the defined settlement boundary of Emmer Green, and is surrounded by detached residential dwellings on generous plots featuring mature gardens and planted frontages.

Gravel Hill extends East to West, taking the form of rural lane beyond the estate road of Merthyr Vale, and providing access to the Chilterns AONB beyond the defined settlement boundary. Tree and shrub planting line both sides of this section of the road, reinforcing the established suburban character of the locality.

The local centre of Emmer Green provides shops, and a place of worship, and is served by a public bus route on Surley Row, providing access to Reading town centre.

Development Proposal

A linear in-fill development of 2 No. family sized 4-5 bed detached houses is proposed, reflecting prevailing the built form of the area, generally comprising a mix of dwelling types and styles, arranged informally and set back from the road with soft landscaped areas and parking to the frontages. Private rear gardens are available to the rear of each property.

Design & Layout

The proposed detached houses are 5 bedroom family sized each with a GIA of 240m², with detached car ports to the frontage. The design incorporates a two storey front gable and lowered eaves and ridge height, with flat roof wall dormers. The buildings shall be constructed using a traditional palate of materials, including facing brick walls with horizontal cladding to the upper level, and plain clay roof tiles.

The internal layouts are generally arranged to provide South facing primary living spaces and 1st floor balconies, affording views of the Chilterns AONB beyond.

Private rear gardens, each accommodating garden / cycle storage to outbuildings, are available to each dwelling.

Vehicle hard-standings and parking bays to the front of each house are subdivided by soft landscaping, and set behind a deep planted verge extending across the site frontage.

Plot 1 is sited on the Western side of the site, and approx. 5 metres away from the adjacent bungalow, No.31, with a detached carport and hard-standing to the frontage.

Plot 2 sits on a plateau occupying the position of the existing bungalow, and is a mirror image of the building to plot 1. The floor level to plot 2 is lower than the existing dwelling, effectively reducing the gradient of the access drive and minimising steps up to the entrance. A double carport is also proposed to the frontage.

Neighbouring Amenity

The dwellings are arranged to be set away from the shared boundaries, with Plot 1 positioned to the N/E of No. 29, and Plot 3 to the N/W of No. 25. The position and orientation of the dwellings proposed serve to limit any potential overshadowing or overbearing impact upon the immediate neighbours. Side facing upper floor level windows are limited to face into the site, serving stairwell and bathroom windows, effectively preserving privacy to the adjacent neighbours properties.

Highways, Transport & Accessibility

The existing access shall be maintained and shared, with suitable pedestrian and vehicular visibility splays afforded at the site entrance.

The road width along this stretch of Gravel Hill measures 4.8m, with the entrance to Merthyr Vale residential street beyond. A grassed verge / service strip extends along the opposite side of the Road. Beyond Merthyr Vale, Gravel Hill narrows to a country lane.

The nearest public bus service is along Surley Row. The local centre of Emmer Green and Highdown School are reasonably accessible. Secure cycle storage to garden outbuildings will be provided to each dwelling.

Each house shall have 2 dedicated parking bays with additional parking available to the turning forecourts.

Ecology, Trees & Landscaping

A semi mature Oak tree adjacent to the site entrance shall be retained and protected. The layout provides for a generous tree and shrub planted frontage reinforcing and enhancing the prevailing urban fringe character along Gravel Hill. The layout provides for several specimen trees within the site, and space between the buildings to allow for hedging boundaries and shrub planted verges, effectively breaking up the hard surfacing to the frontages. Private rear gardens are available to the rear of each dwelling.

An Ecological Survey report accompanies this application, including recommendations to enhance biodiversity and to protect and flora and fauna on site.

Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted November 2019)

The following policies are particularly relevant:

Policy CC1 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development. States that a positive approach to considering development proposals will be taken that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. Where appropriate, the Council will work proactively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible. The policy continues by stating that planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Planning applications that accord with the policies in the development plan will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Proposed development that conflicts with the development plan will be refused, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Policy CC5 – Waste Minimisation and Storage. States that development should demonstrate measures to minimise the generation of waste in construction, use and life of buildings and promote more sustainable approaches to waste management, including the re-use and recycling of construction waste and the promotion of layouts and designs that provide adequate, well-designed space to facilitate waste storage, reuse, recycling and composition.

Policy CC7 – Design and the Public Realm. States that all development must be of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The various components of development form include: layout; landscape; density and mix; scale (height and massing); and architectural details and materials. These will be assessed to ensure that the development makes a positive contribution to the following urban design objectives:

- Character;
- Continuity and enclosure;
- Quality of the public realm and provision of green infrastructure and landscaping;
- Ease of movement and permeability;

- Legibility;
- Adaptability;
- Diversity.

Developments will be assessed to ensure that they, 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.

Policy CC8 – Safeguarding Amenity. Requires that development does not result in a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties in terms of:

- Privacy and overlooking;
- Access to sunlight and daylight;
- Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;
- Harm to outlook;
- Noise and disturbance;
- Artificial lighting;
- Vibration;
- Dust and fumes;
- Smell;
- Crime and safety.

The position of habitable rooms, windows and outdoor living spaces will be particularly important. A back to back distance of 20 metres between dwellings is usually appropriate.

Policy CC9 – Securing Infrastructure. Proposals for development will not be permitted unless infrastructure, services, resources, amenities or other assets lost or impacted upon as a result of the development or made necessary by the development will be provided through direct provision or financial contributions at the appropriate time.

Policy H1 – Provision of Housing. Confirms that provision will be made for at least 15,847 homes (averaging 689 homes per annum) in Reading Borough for the period 2012 to 2036. Para.4.4.5 confirms that the Housing Trajectory is set out at Appendix 1 and this sets out how the housing requirement in Policy H1 will be met over the plan period. Of the 689 homes per annum, small scale unidentified sites (i.e. <10 units) are expected to contribute 127 homes per annum (18.5% of the annual requirement). This is within a context described by the Council of a borough with a tightly defined urban area constrained by floodplain and public open space.

Policy H2 – Density and mix. States that the appropriate density of residential development will be informed by:

- The character and mix of uses of the area in which it is located, including the housing mix, and including consideration of any nearby heritage assets or important landscape or townscape areas;
- Its current and future level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport;
- The need to achieve high quality design;
- The need to maximise the efficiency of land use; and
- The need to minimise environmental impacts, including detrimental impacts on the amenities of adjoining occupiers.

Indicative densities are set out in figure 4.5. The application site has a suburban fringe context and therefore the density range is 30-60 dwellings per hectare. Wherever possible, residential development should contribute towards meeting the needs for the mix of housing set out in figure 4.6. This confirms that 41.5% should be 3 bed properties and 18.5% should be 4 plus bed properties.

Policy H3 – Affordable housing. On sites of 1-4 dwellings, a financial contribution will be made that will enable the equivalent of 10% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough. Where proposals fall short of the policy target as a result of viability considerations, an open book approach will be taken with the onus on the applicant to demonstrate the circumstances justifying a lower affordable housing contribution.

Policy H5 – Standards for New Housing. States that new built housing should be built to the following standards, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would render a development unviable:

- a. All new build housing outside the Central Area as defined on the Proposals Map will comply with the nationally-described space standard.
- b. All new build housing will be built to the higher water efficiency standard under Regulation 36(3) of the Building regulations;
- c. All major new-build residential development should be designed to achieve zero carbon homes.
- d. All other new build housing will achieve at a minimum a 19% improvement in the dwelling emission rate over the target emission rate, as defined in the 2013 Building Regulations.
- e. All new build housing will be accessible and adaptable in line with M4(2) of the Building Regulations, unless it is built in line with M4(3).
- f. On development of 20 or more new build dwellings, at least 5% of dwellings will be wheelchair user dwellings in line with M4(3) of the Building Regulations.

Policy H10 – Private and Communal Open Space. States that dwellings will be provided with functional private or communal open space, including green space wherever possible, that allows for suitable sitting-out areas, children's play areas, home food production, green waste composting, refuse storage, general outdoor storage and drying space. Houses will be provided with outdoor private space. The design of outdoor areas will respect the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity and should not be compromised by the relationship of other buildings which may be detrimental in terms of overlooking, overbearing or overshadowing.

Policy H11 – Development of Private Residential Gardens. States that proposals for new residential development that includes land within the curtilage or the former curtilage of private residential gardens will be acceptable where:

1) The proposal makes 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 lines, 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.
- Compatibility with the general building heights 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.

2) The application site provides a site of adequate size and dimensions to accommodate the development proposed in terms of the setting and spacing around buildings, amenity space, landscaping and space for access roads and parking;

3) The proposal includes access, which meets appropriate highway standards;

4) The proposal does not lead to tandem development;

5) The design and layout minimises exposure of existing private boundaries to public areas, and avoids the need for additional physical security measures;

6) The proposal does not cause a significant detrimental impact to the amenity of adjacent and nearby occupants;

7) The emphasis is on the provision of family-sized housing;

8) The development provides biodiversity net gain, and would not have an adverse impact on biodiversity in terms of the fragmentation of blocks of gardens, which as a unit or in association with adjacent green space are deemed to make an important contribution to biodiversity and contribute to the green network; and

9) The proposal does not prejudice the satisfactory development of a wider area.

Policy TR3 – Access, Traffic and Highway-related Matters. In determining proposals involving a new or altered access onto the transport network, improvement works to the transport network, the creation of new transport infrastructure or the generation of additional trips on the transport network, consideration will be given to the effect on safety, congestion and the environment.

Summary

While below the provisions of the local plan, the net density of 15 DPH proposed is reflective of the site characteristics, constraints, and adherence to the linear pattern of development of the locality, characterised by detached dwellings on relatively large plots, reflecting the suburban fringe setting.

The proposal meets in full the Council's adopted policies and should be supported for the following reasons;

- The proposal makes the best use of a site in a sustainable location within the tightly defined settlement boundary of Reading, with access to associated shops, services, amenities and public transport, and as such is supported from national and local policy (i.e. NPPF and Local Plan Policy CC1).
- The proposal is designed to reflect the scale, and spacing of existing development within this location, with the layout and design following the evaluation of the site and surrounding area. The proposal provides for a form of development that is appropriate to the character and appearance of the surrounding area in terms of its size, scale, layout, height and design in accordance with the NPPF and Policies CC7, H2 and H11 of the adopted Local Plan.
- The proposal provides for family sized dwellings (4 and 5 bed) in line with Policy H2.
- The siting of the buildings has taken into account the positioning of adjacent dwellings and ensures that the proposal would not result in any loss of amenity to occupants of adjoining properties. Policy CC8 is therefore met.
- The site is accessible to public transport modes and provides for adequate and safe access, car parking and secure cycle storage.

Appendix 1 – site photographs

Fig. 1 – view from N/E of site towards S/E



Fig. 2 – view of site entrance from site



Fig. 3 – view of site entrance from opposite Gravel Hill towards N/W



Fig. 4 – view from entrance of No. 25 (No. 27 to LH side background)



Fig. 5 – view from site entrance facing East



Fig. 6 – view from site entrance facing West (Entrance to Methyr Vale opposite)



Fig. 7 – view of site entrance facing North (No. 29 tp LH side)



Fig. 8 – frontage view of No. 23 Gravel Hill

