
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 March 2021

by Robert Parker BSc (Hons) Dip TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 April 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/20/3265230

322 Wokingham Road, Reading RG6 1JU

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr P Syhana against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 200785, dated 9 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 4 August 2020.
 - The development proposed is two storey, two beds, detached dwelling for 4 people with associated amenity space and external alteration of existing building.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - a) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area;
 - b) whether the development would provide a satisfactory living environment for its occupants, with particular regard to outlook, noise and outdoor amenity space;
 - c) the effect of the proposal on the living conditions of the occupiers of 322 Wokingham Road and 1 Holmes Road, with reference to outlook, daylight, sunlight and privacy; and
 - d) whether the scheme makes adequate provision for car parking and the effect of the parking arrangements on highway safety on Wokingham Road.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. Nos 320 and 322 Wokingham Road are an attractive pair of semi-detached residential properties prominently located at the junction with Holmes Road. The building occupies a modest parcel of land which provides for external amenity space and car parking. The main space belonging to No 322 is sandwiched between the building and an adjoining petrol filling station. The proposed dwelling would be constructed on this part of the site. It would be set back behind the front wall of No 322 to facilitate car parking on the frontage.

4. The proposed design would mimic the distinctive brick quoins and brick band course on Nos 320 and 322. However, the form and proportions of the dwelling, with its narrow façade and deep two-storey flanks, would bear little relation to the existing semi-detached properties. The development would be shoehorned into the gap at the side of No 322, encroaching on the setting of the donor building. The urban grain in this part of Wokingham Road is varied as a result of the area's mixed character, but this does not justify a form of development which is visibly cramped and out of character.
5. Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) (RBLP) seeks high design quality which maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area. RBLP Policy H11 relates specifically to the development of private residential gardens. It states that schemes will be acceptable where, amongst other things, 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. Development is required to make a positive contribution to the character of the area, including in terms of its layout and relationship to existing built form. In my judgement, the proposal fails to have proper regard to these policy requirements.
6. RBLP Policy EN14 requires new development to make provision for tree retention and planting within the application site, particularly on the street frontage, to improve the level of tree coverage within the Borough, to maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area in which a site is located, to provide for biodiversity and to contribute to measures to reduce carbon and adapt to climate change. RBLP Policies CC3 and CC7 similarly encourage the inclusion of landscaping for reasons of townscape enhancement and adaption to climate change. Although there is no significant greenery to maintain on the site, there is the opportunity to enhance it. The proposed layout shows the site frontage dominated by car parking and hard surfacing, and in this context the lack of landscaping weighs against the scheme.
7. I conclude that the proposal would be materially harmful to the character and appearance of the area, in conflict with RBLP Policies CC3, CC7, H11 and EN14.

Quality of living environment

8. Most of the habitable accommodation within the proposed dwelling would be located at first floor. There would be a communal area (essentially an open plan lounge and kitchen) off a central lobby with bedrooms at the front and rear of the building. The communal area would be served by a pair of windows, one in each flank wall, but these would be obscurely glazed. Although I have no reason to believe that the room would be inadequately lit, there would be no outlook. Given that residents might be expected to spend large amounts of time in this area, this would give rise to a poor standard of living accommodation.
9. Policy H10 of the RBLP requires that houses are provided with private outdoor open space 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. The design of outdoor areas should respect the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity. Guidelines within the supporting text indicate that the useable private outdoor space for houses should be no less than the gross floor area of the dwelling to which it relates.

10. At approximately 53 m², the garden of the proposed dwelling would be substantially smaller than the outdoor spaces available to other homes surrounding the site, including 320 Wokingham Road and adjoining properties in Holmes Road and Whiteknights Road. The area would be smaller than the footprint of the proposed dwelling and consequently it would not comply with the Council's guidelines. The garden would have some amenity value, but its constrained size means that it would not contribute to the high quality of life sought by Policy H10.
11. The Council is concerned that the position of the rear bedroom adjacent to the communal living area would create noise and disturbance. Whilst there is always this possibility, much would depend on the nature of the household. There is no compelling evidence before me to demonstrate that unsatisfactory living conditions would ensue from this internal layout. Notwithstanding this, I find that the deficiencies of the communal area and the rear garden would conflict with the requirement of RBLP Policy CC8 that development should not cause unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties.

Effect on the living conditions of neighbours

12. No 322 Wokingham Road has various windows in its side elevation. A first floor opening serves a bedroom, whilst several at ground floor provide natural light and the sole means of outlook for a bedroom, kitchen and dining room. All but one of the windows serve habitable rooms.
13. The proposed dwelling would be sited directly in front of these windows, at a distance of 1.5 m. The new two-storey building would reduce levels of daylight, block sunlight and restrict outlook from the affected rooms. The proximity of built form would be oppressive for the occupiers of No 322 and there would be a significant adverse impact on their living conditions.
14. The rear bedroom of the proposed dwelling would provide views into the garden of 1 Holmes Road. Some overlooking is inevitable in urban situations, but the views would be direct in character and moreover the proximity of the windows to the boundary would be intrusive for the neighbours. This would infringe their privacy in an unacceptable manner.
15. The proposed building would sit partly alongside the back garden of No 322. Not only would this area be too small, suffering from the same size deficiencies as the new dwelling, but the quality of the amenity space would be poor due to the overbearing and overshadowing nature of the development.
16. According, I conclude that the proposal would have an unacceptable impact on the living conditions of neighbours. It would be contrary to the requirement of RBLP Policies CC8 and H11 that development should not have a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties. There would also be conflict with RBLP Policy H10 in relation to the size and quality of the private outdoor space remaining for No 322.

Parking and highway safety

17. The Council's Revised Parking Standards and Design Supplementary Planning Document (2011) (SPD) indicates that the development would be required to make parking provision of 1.5 spaces for the proposed dwelling as well as maintaining provision for the existing dwelling. Based on my reading of the SPD, the requirement for 3 spaces is reasonable. A lesser provision of parking

would not be appropriate, notwithstanding the site's accessibility to public transport. The adopted standards have been devised using car ownership data for the relevant zone and on this basis they are robust.

18. Although the scheme makes provision for 3 parking spaces, these would be smaller than the sizes recommended by the SPD, and the aisle width would be seriously inadequate. It is unlikely that most vehicles would be able to enter and exit the spaces. Even if it were possible, the exercise would involve a reversing manoeuvre across the public footway. Given that Wokingham Road is a busy arterial route and part of the National Cycle Route (NCN422), this would present an unacceptable risk to pedestrians, cyclists and other highway users.
19. I acknowledge that there is already limited room to turn vehicles on the gravel driveway. However, the proposal would further restrict available space, and is likely to lead to more comings and goings, which would exacerbate existing problems. Those inadequacies do not justify the proposed parking arrangement which could lead to overspill parking in the surrounding area, to the detriment of existing residents and the safe and efficient operation of the local road network.
20. I therefore conclude that the proposal fails to make adequate provision for car parking in line with the Council's adopted standards. There would be conflict with RBLP Policies TR3 and TR5 insofar as these require development to provide appropriate levels of car parking and avoid detrimental impacts on the functioning of the transport network and the safety of its users, including pedestrians and cyclists.

Other Matters

21. Planning permission was refused on the grounds that the proposal does not secure an acceptable contribution towards the provision of affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough, in line with RBLP Policy H3 and the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document 2013. The appellant has provided a signed planning obligation with the appeal, but the parties disagree on whether the drafting, which omits a sum for the contribution, would achieve the planning objectives. Since the appeal is being dismissed for other reasons my decision does not turn on this matter.
22. The appellant argues that the site constitutes brownfield land. However, the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that residential gardens within built-up areas do not qualify as previously developed land. Clearly this does not prevent land within the curtilage of dwellings being developed, but it will only be acceptable where proposals comply with the policies of the local plan.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

23. The proposal would conflict with the development plan read as a whole, due to its adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the area, the living conditions of neighbours and highway safety. The poor living environment for future occupiers would be a further source of policy conflict.
24. The scheme would contribute to the supply of housing in a location which has good access to services and facilities. However, the benefits of a single dwelling would be very modest and they are not sufficient to outweigh the significant cumulative harm. There are no material considerations to justify a decision otherwise than in accordance with the development plan.

25. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Robert Parker

INSPECTOR