

Design & Access Statement

Construction Method Statement



Proposal for a detached two bed dwelling on land adjacent to 171 Blagdon Rd

i. Introduction

This application follows on from planning application(ref 160752) - which was initially refused by Reading Borough Council, then appealed(ref APP/E0345/W/16/3162427).

The proposal is essentially for the same type of development, but aims to address or alleviate concerns raised by the Planning Officer(Ralph Chakadya) and later the Planning Inspector(Patrick Whelan).

The proposal is for a self build two bedroom detached house built within land that currently forms part of the garden area of number 171 Blagdon Road(#171). The applicant wishes to construct a modern, warm & efficient home to live in and which his 5yo son, who currently lives in Finland, can visit.

ii. Site Location & Description

The site is located approximately 3 miles from Reading Train Station. Approximately every 15 minutes buses run between the station, town centre and Shinfield Road, the nearest bus stop is about 2 minutes walk east of the site. (numbers 3, 9 & 144 buses stop at the Shinfield Rd / Beech Rd junction).

The site lies north of Blagdon Road and opposite Rabson Recreational Ground. Properties in the area are typical to number 171 in terms of design, type and date. The site benefits from a large triangular plot that is situated between Hazel Crescent and Blagdon Road.

The site is located in Zone 3, Reading Town Centre is a 20 minutes bus ride away from the site(number 9 bus, every 15 minutes). The main train station is 11 minutes drive from Blagdon Road with direct train connections to London. The town centre can be reached on foot within 30 minutes, or in approximately 10/15 minutes by bicycle.

iii. Building Design & Materials

The proposal is designed to mirror the gable end of number 27 Highmead Close which faces onto Blagdon Road (and other similar examples on Blagdon Road). As the proposal is for a standalone dwelling it avoids 'unbalancing' the pairs of semi's that exist on this part of Blagdon Road which would be a danger if the current dwelling (#171) was extended.

Materials would be selected to match those used in this part of Blagdon Road. The roof pitch will match that of neighbouring houses. The height of the ridge will match the pattern of steps between houses seen on this part of Blagdon Road, which in turn reflects the gradient.

iv. Floor Area, Private Amenity Space

The Proposal would offer a gross internal floor area of 70m² - equally divided between the two floors.

The total private amenity space of the proposed dwelling would exceed 140m². This would result in 171 Blagdon Road retaining 90m² of private amenity space.

v. Layout

Please refer to the floor and block plans.

The proposal consists of a largely open plan ground floor kitchen/living/dining area. Double doors open onto the side garden. A small separate utility area (suitable for washing machine, boiler) and downstairs wc are provided.

The first floor is accessed via an open staircase leading to a landing providing access to two bedrooms each with an ensuite bathroom.

The area over the stairs is proposed to have the ceiling attached to the roof purlins, to provide a more spacious feeling and allow possible later installation of a roof light over the stairs.

vi. Access & Parking

The proposal will be accessed via Blagdon Road.

The proposal includes two off road parking spaces (requested by the transport consultation of previous application) which would exit to a new dropped curb. 171 Blagdon Road would retain its existing parking space and dropped curb..

vii. Impact on the Character of the Area

We feel that the street elevation document shows a design that fits in well with the character of the area.

Currently 171 Blagdon Road presents a largely blind side wall, the proposal will help to hide this and present a side wall of more interest. Further it improves the street scene by completing the row of houses from Highmead Close towards the corner of Hazel Crescent. This mimics the pattern of development further down Blagdon Road. We also feel the proposal would limit the somewhat 'awkward' view that exists through to the rear of Hazel Crescent dwellings from Cherry Grove(opposite). We believe these are slight positive factors.

The distinctive hedged pattern of front gardens on this section of Blagdon Road will be maintained for #171 and continued in the front garden area of the proposal.

viii. Climate Change(policy DM1)

The adaptability of the proposal to deal with climate change has been considered and addressed where possible. The bedrooms and the ground floor living space will benefit from significant natural daylight. The dwelling has east and south facing windows ideal for achieving solar gain in the morning and throughout the day.

The proposal would be equipped with rain water harvesting in the form of water butts for garden maintenance supply.

The applicant would like(if possible) to re-position the solar panels currently on site and connect them to the new dwelling(This would require re-application for the feed in tariff).

The proposed dwelling would also be fitted by an air source heat pump to provide an energy efficient and economic means of heating. It is proposed that the unit could be neatly positioned in the recessed right rear corner of the proposed dwelling.

Low power lighting and appliances will be used throughout.

These factors should contribute to reducing the carbon footprint of the new dwelling, which would also be insulated to a high standard.

ix. Impact on Neighbours

We have taken care to ensure no overlooking of the neighbours to the rear(Hazel Crescent) or occupants of #171 by specifying all side and rear 1st floor windows are obscure glazed. The separating distance to the *nearest* property is in excess of 20m. The applicant intends to plant screening such as bamboo or small native trees to the rear of the proposed dwelling where possible to provide further separation.

The front garden area is designed to mirror those of existing houses on Blagdon Road(hedges continued). We do not believe the proposal will have a negative impact on any of the neighbouring houses further down Blagdon Road. There are no nearby houses directly opposite or up the hill from the proposed dwelling.

If any neighbours are concerned about aspects of this potential development - the applicant is happy to try to address any concerns.

x. Landscaping

A small retaining wall will be used to compensate for the natural slope of the site as well as sections of sloping bank, maintaining the tiered effect that already exists. Trees that are currently on site will be retained or repositioned and the garden will be suitably landscaped.

Additional hedging will be planted(each side of the proposed dwelling's driveway) to match that further down Blagdon Road. A patio area will be added outside the doors to the garden of the proposed dwelling, leading onto a predominantly lawned area. Screening will be planted to the rear boundary such as bamboo or small/ornamental native trees.

The larger outbuilding currently in the garden of #171 will be dismantled and replaced by a more suitably sized cycle/storage shed. A patio area will be added and the garden lawned to the boundary. Small native trees will be planted near the boundary.

xi. Refuse & Bicycle Storage

Secure cycle storage for the new dwelling will be provided in the form of a small shed that already exists on site, lock points will be added internally.

Areas for bin storage will be provided within the respective garden areas and bins taken to the street on collection days, as is currently the case.

xii. Site Survey Obtained

Since the previous application(160752), the applicant has obtained a topographic survey of the site. This has highlighted some inaccuracies in the previous application due to estimated measurements and areas gaged from OS based site plans.

The largest inaccuracy was the portrayal of the gap between houses further down the street as being 4m when in fact they are close to 3.5m. Previous estimates of garden areas were also on the conservative side and are now accurately defined in this application. The survey has also allowed us to accurately gauge the ridge height of preceding dwellings and continue the step pattern that exists on this part of Blagdon Road.

Conclusions of the Appeal

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/16/3162427

by Patrick Whelan BA(Hons) Dip Arch MA MSc ARB RIBA RTPI

The appeal looked at three issues that arose from the planning officer's report:

- (1) The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area
 - (2) Whether it should provide a financial contribution to affordable housing
 - (3) Whether it would provide acceptable living conditions for existing and future occupiers in terms of private amenity space
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Issue (1)

The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area

The inspector assessed the reasons the proposal had been considered an overdevelopment and whether it would create a cramped appearance(policy DM11).

4. I appreciate that the back garden of the proposed house would be short compared to neighbouring plots. However, given the tapering shape of the existing street block layout and the way the layout of the house has been arranged to address the street and the side garden rather than the back, when considered as a factor in isolation, the break from the existing pattern of development would not be harmful.

5. The resulting back garden area of the existing house would be smaller than the back gardens of neighbouring houses. However, being around three-quarters of the area of its adjoining neighbour, and given its location towards the tip of the triangle of the street block towards which back garden depths diminish, considered as a factor on its own, it would not be significantly out of character with similar spaces in the area.

6. In so far as Policy DM10 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Sites and Detailed Policies Document, adopted 2012, with alterations adopted January 2015 (SDPD) seeks outdoor areas which respect the size of similar spaces in the vicinity, the very limited conflict from the proposal would be insufficient to warrant dismissal of the appeal on this factor.

7. Notwithstanding this, a critical component of the pattern of development of the houses in this part of Blagdon Road, which is reflected in the housing in Hazel Crescent and in which context the proposal would be viewed, is the generally consistent and substantial gap between the flanks of neighbouring houses. The lateral gap between the existing house and the proposed would be conspicuously less than between No 163 and No 165 and between No 167 and No 169 in the same

section of street. This would diminish a coherent component in the distinctively spacious pattern of development in this part of Blagdon Road.

8. When this is considered together with the effects of back garden depth and back garden area described above, the combined effect would be a cramped character of development. I acknowledge that the house reflects many features of the surrounding housing, including the curved front alignment of the street block and the form and siting of 27 Highmead Close. In terms of its appearance, the proposed house would not be out of place in the street scene. However, in spatial terms, for the reason above, it would harm the spacious character of development in the area.

9. It would thus conflict with SDPD Policy DM11 which seeks, amongst other objectives, development that makes a positive contribution to the character of the area in terms including its integration with the surrounding area, the rhythm of plot frontages, and the relationship of the existing built form and spaces around buildings. It would be at odds too with the Framework1 which says that decisions should aim to ensure that developments respond to local character and reinforce local distinctiveness.

A key factor in the inspector's conclusion appears to be the unequal gap between houses(paragraph 7). Therefore this application revises the plans to move the proposed dwelling roughly 70cm sideways to very closely match the spacing pattern that exists between houses further down Blagdon Road(approx 3.5m between front corners). In paragraph 8 it is stated that the "combined" effect of the house spacing issue and garden dimensions would be to create a cramped affect.

By wholly addressing the spacing issue we feel we have removed the major remaining component of concern of a potentially cramped development.

Additionally, by obtaining a survey of the site we have also been able to more accurately calculate garden sizes which previously had been estimated from OS based plans. As a result the rear garden area retained by #171 can now be defined in this application as in excess of 90m² (previous application estimated at - 81m²). Closer to the average garden sizes in the immediate area and exceeding 75% of the that of the direct neighbour. In regard to the 81m² estimated in the previous application the inspector recognises that while the retained garden of #171 is smaller than nearby neighbours, it's relative size is within a reasonable margin and follows the tapering pattern of rear garden spaces that already exists. The inspector states on this matter in isolation - "it would not be significantly out of character with similar spaces in the area"(paragraph 5).

To make the rear garden space of the proposed house more practical - by moving the proposal over c0.7m we have also been able to add a side pathway to access the proposed dwelling's rear garden area. This slightly increases the area and we hope adds to the utility of this small rear garden space, coupled with the more substantial side garden. The inspector concludes on the rear garden depth issue alone, given the orientation of the

proposed dwelling to favour the side garden - “the break from the existing pattern of development would not be harmful”(paragraph 4).

Both the planning officer and inspector were satisfied that the design of the building would not look out of place in the area.

Issue (2)

Whether it should provide a financial contribution to affordable housing

Given the inspector's conclusion on this the applicant would like to attempt to reach agreement on an s106 affordable housing contribution. Although he would protest that as an individual aspiring to self build a single dwelling and given his specific situation, this will represent a significant burden. At this stage it is not certain that he will be able to fund the build itself, or this addition payment.

Issue (3)

Whether it would provide acceptable living conditions for existing and future occupiers in terms of private amenity space

The inspector comments:

16. I acknowledge that the proposal would reduce the area of the back garden of the existing house; however, it would retain a back garden of substantial size, sufficient for the needs of its occupiers. Though the back garden of the proposed house would be constrained, the garden to the side of the house would be substantial. Whilst triangular in shape it would be of sufficient dimensions to accommodate the needs of the occupiers of a 2-bedroom house, and the hedge along the street boundary would provide sufficient screening to secure their privacy.

17. The overall effect in terms of quantity and quality of outdoor space is that the development would provide acceptable living conditions for existing and future occupiers in terms of private amenity space. It would comply with SDPD Policies DM10 and DM11 which seek private outdoor space that allows for suitable sitting-out, children’s play, home food production, composting, refuse, and general storage, and which respects the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity.

The inspector is satisfied that the private amenity space is adequate, both that retained for #171 and that for the proposed dwelling.

Conclusion

With this application we hope to address the outstanding issues defined by the inspector, while leaving most(previously satisfactory) aspects of the proposed development unchanged.

Changes from prior application:

- Proposed dwelling is moved further from #171 to match(3.5m) gap of nearby houses
- Proposal is marginally reduced in depth(and area) to allow this
- Ridge height is adjusted to match step pattern of this part of the street
- Pathway to rear garden area provided for proposal
- Retained rear garden space for #171 more accurately defined at 90m²
- Air source heat pump included in proposal
- Internal layout slightly altered to accommodate the reduction in size
- Simplified proposed boundary(in two straight sections rather than three)