



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 February 2020

by S Edwards MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 07 May 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/19/3237840
45 Upper Redlands Road, Reading RG1 5JE

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr A Sharp (Hurst Grove Estates) against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 182214, dated 14 December 2018, was refused by notice dated 5 August 2019.
 - The development proposed is planning application for erection of 4 dwellinghouses and accesses with associated landscaping and parking.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. In November 2019, the Reading Borough Local Plan (LP) was formally adopted by the Council. The policies contained within this document supersede all existing development plans in Reading, including the Reading Borough LDF Core Strategy and the Sites and Detailed Policies Document. I shall determine the appeal in accordance with the most up-to-date policies, on which the parties have had the opportunity to comment during the course of the appeal.
3. A signed Unilateral Undertaking (UU), pursuant to Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), dated 14 January 2020. The UU would secure the provision of a financial contribution towards affordable housing, which I shall return to later in this decision.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the Redlands Conservation Area and the setting of nearby listed buildings; and
 - Whether the proposal would make adequate provision for affordable housing.

Reasons

Heritage Assets

5. Located within the Redlands Conservation Area, the appeal site comprises undeveloped gardens located to the rear and side of no 45 Upper Redlands Road, a prominent corner plot which is occupied by an imposing Victorian villa. As well as Upper Redlands Road, the site benefits from aspects onto Redlands

Road and New Road and is formally enclosed by a substantial front boundary wall.

6. As detailed within the Redlands Conservation Area Appraisal¹ (CAA), this is a tightly drawn essentially Victorian/Edwardian suburb of Reading. The special interest of this designated heritage asset derives to a large extent from the sheer variety, exuberance and blending of the architectural styles of the Victorian period in such close proximity. The Appraisal adds that this is reinforced by the retention of boundary walls and railings throughout the area which, together with mature tree cover, give the area its coherence. It also makes particular reference to the corner buildings, which strictly have a more commanding presence.
7. The appeal site forms part of the Upper Redlands Road and 17-19 Redlands Road character area, which is primarily characterised by large detached and semi-detached houses standing in extensive and well-treed grounds. By reason of the size of the building itself and its siting within spacious and verdant grounds, there is no doubt that no 45 Upper Redlands Road reflects this part of the conservation area and therefore makes an important contribution to the character and appearance of this designated heritage asset. In that regard, the appeal site contrasts with the New Road character area, a quiet and more intimate road of smaller early Victorian houses and cottages, which forms a separate character area.
8. The Upper Redlands Road character area also includes Wantage Hall, an imposing hall of residence set within generous and landscaped grounds, which is situated opposite the appeal site. As the first purpose-built hall of residence in Reading constructed after the Oxford and Cambridge colleges, the significance of this Grade II Listed Building resides in both its historic and neo-Tudor architectural interest. As Wantage Hall is experienced within the leafy residential surroundings situated on the opposite side of Upper Redlands Road in particular, the spaciousness of development contributes to the suburban character of the locality, and thus the setting and significance of this Listed Building.
9. The appeal scheme would lead to a substantial loss of garden space, which is presently commensurate to the size of most corner plots in this part of the conservation area. This would be exacerbated by the construction of two large detached dwellings between the outbuilding adjacent to no 45 Upper Redlands Road and no 43 Upper Redlands Road which would further diminish the prevailing sense of place in the locality. Similarly, the construction of a large house on plot 2 would reduce to a harmful degree the visual gap between no 45 Upper Redlands Road and no 17 Redlands Road. Whilst the development would enable the retention of a reasonable amount of garden space for the existing property, it would nevertheless erode the contribution made by the appeal site to the spacious character of the Redlands Conservation Area, and to a lesser extent, the setting of Wantage Hall, to the detriment of the significance of these designated heritage assets.
10. Additionally, the proposal would require the removal of a number of mature trees which currently form a substantial part of the green backdrop in the street scene. Their loss would dilute the visual impact that this group of trees collectively makes to the conservation area. Although the proposal includes a

¹ March 2008.

replanting scheme, this would likely take a considerable length of time to mature before additional landscaping is able to satisfactorily mitigate for the loss of the trees.

11. The new dwelling on plot 1 would be set back to reflect the building line of no 19 Redlands Road and permit the retention of the coppiced lime tree located on the road frontage. However, the proposed house would nevertheless fail to relate to the prevailing pattern of development along New Road, where properties follow a consistent front building line which contributes to the street's overall coherence.
12. I have similar concerns in respect of the siting of the proposed dwellings on plots 3 and 4, which would detract from the established front building line along this part of Upper Redlands Road. Although the degree of set back would reduce their prominence within the street scene, which would also be assisted by the partial screening provided by the front boundary wall, the proposed dwellings would nevertheless remain widely visible within the street scene. No 41 Upper Redlands Road would also partially screen the proposed development, but this would only be achieved in views from certain angles.
13. The very tangible sense of enclosure which characterises the street scene in this part of the conservation area can be drawn in part from the buildings themselves. However, the front boundary walls, together with the complementing soft landscaping, also make a significant contribution to this highly pleasing townscape, by reason of their substantial scale and prominence within the street scene. Despite their varied appearance, I therefore find that the removal of large areas of brick wall to provide access to the new dwellings would compound the identified harm.
14. The proposed punctuation of several sections of walls would cause unacceptable harm to the integrity of the street scene, which would be detrimental to the appearance of the conservation area. The curving of the openings using salvaged bricks would do little to offset the interruption and identified harm. I appreciate that the relevant sections of wall did not meet the criteria for listing, but Historic England's letter makes nonetheless reference to their clear local interest, which adds to the built texture of this part of Reading.
15. The appellant argues that the settings of both the Redlands Conservation Area and Wantage Hall have already been heavily compromised with modern development² located immediately adjacent to the Grade II Listed Building. However, this was in the context of the redevelopment of the former Reading University Wells Hall of Residence. Despite its proximity to the appeal site, the circumstances of this particular scheme are not considered to be comparable to the proposal before me, and therefore provide no justification for a development which would be harmful.
16. The appeal scheme would neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of the Redlands Conservation Area and would have a detrimental impact on the setting of Wantage Hall. Although it would be less than substantial, the harm which would be caused to these designated heritage assets should be afforded considerable importance and great weight. In such circumstances, the identified harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, in accordance with paragraph 196 of the National

² Local Planning Authority References 121820 and 140428.

Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The proposal would bring benefits to local housing supply and employment, to which I give limited weight by reason of the small scale of the development. Other public benefits include financial contributions towards affordable housing and through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which are ascribed moderate weight in favour of the development.

17. Whilst it is also argued that the appeal scheme would make an effective use of vacant and underutilised land for much needed family housing, planning decisions also have to take into account the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting. In this particular instance, I find that the public benefits associated with the proposal would not, cumulatively, be sufficient to outweigh the harm to both the Redlands Conservation Area and the setting of Wantage Hall.
18. For the foregoing reasons, the appeal scheme would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the Redlands Conservation Area, and the setting of the Grade II listed Wantage Hall. It would therefore conflict with LP Policies EN1, EN3 and EN6, as well as the Redlands CAA. Amongst other things, these policies seek to ensure that historic features, areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment, including their settings are protected and where possible enhanced, but also that the historic environment will inform and shape new development. Furthermore, the proposed development would not conserve designated heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance and subsequently fail to accord with the Framework.

Affordable Housing

19. LP Policy H3 requires residential development to make an appropriate contribution towards affordable housing to meet the needs of Reading. In respect of sites of 1-4 dwellings, this should equate to a financial contribution equivalent of 10% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough. Whilst national policy states that the provision of affordable housing should not be sought for residential development resulting in the creation of less than 10 units, detailed evidence has been provided by the Council to substantiate the existence of specific local circumstances within the Borough which, consequently, justify a lower threshold.
20. The Council and the appellant have agreed a financial contribution of £158,333.33 towards affordable housing, which is equivalent to 5% of the Gross Development Value of the development, in accordance with the Council's Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document³ (SPD). As detailed above, the appellant has submitted a dated and signed UU to secure this financial contribution.
21. Having regard to the evidence before me, this financial contribution is considered necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms, directly related to the development, and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. The submitted UU, in respect of the contribution referred to above, would therefore meet the requirements set within paragraph 56 of the Framework and the tests in Regulation 122 of the CIL Regulations 2010 (as amended). On this basis, I am satisfied that the proposal would make

³ Adopted July 2013.

adequate provision for affordable housing and therefore find no conflict with LP Policy H3, the Council's Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document, and the SPD on Planning Obligations under Section 106 (adopted April 2015).

Other Matters

22. A number of concerns have been raised by interested parties, notably in respect of the effect of the development on the living conditions of neighbouring residents, parking and noise. As I am dismissing the appeal on other substantive grounds, these are not matters which I need to address further here.

Conclusion

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

S Edwards

INSPECTOR