

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Caversham Heights

App Ref: PL/23/0663 Full planning permission

Address: Flat 1, 92 Albert Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7PL

Proposal: Erection of hoarding as a means of enclosure to secure an unoccupied building

Applicant: Widbrook Developments Ltd

Received date: 15 May 2023

Target Decision date: 13 June 2025

Case Officer: Anthony Scholes

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The site relates to land to 92 Albert Road, Caversham located on the east side of Albert Road close to the junction with Chelford Way to the south. The site is subject to Tree Preservation Order 40/06, along with the trees next door at No.94 Albert Road and is within a Green Link. The surrounding area is predominantly residential. Whilst the property was last in use as flats, it is currently vacant.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The proposed development seeks permission for a 2.45m tall fencing along the boundaries along Albert Road, and Chelford Way. The proposal is retrospective, having been erected circa 2022.

Plans Submitted:

Drawing No: PR11.1-101 – Site Plan Rev A

Drawing No: PR11.1-102 – Location Plan Rev A

Drawing No: PR11.1-103 – Elevations Rev B

As received by the Local Planning Authority on 16 May 2023

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Though not specifically relevant, the planning history for the site includes:

PL/25/0422 - Erection of detached dwelling. Under consideration.

PL/25/0425 - Replacement entrance porch and conversion into 2no. semi-detached dwellings. Under Consideration.

PL/24/0496 - Extension and alterations to flats 1 and 3 to create one additional apartment. Withdrawn 21 June 2024

PL/23/1265 - Erection of 4no.dwellings following demolition of existing buildings. Refused 5 March 2024

PL/92/0133 - Two storey extension and conversion of existing building (used as three flats) into seven flats incorporating new dormers, and parking area with new crossover. Refused 26 June 1992

PL/92/0010 - Conversion of existing building (used as three flats) into five flats incorporating new dormers, and parking area with new crossover. Approved (unimplemented) 2 July 1993

3. CONSULTATIONS

The following were consulted:

RBC Transport

No objection subject to condition.

Neighbour letters were sent, and no responses have been received at the time of writing.

4. 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.

5. 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 2024

National Planning Practice Guidance 2019 onwards

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC7 (Design and the Public Realm)

CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity)

H9 (House Extensions and Ancillary Accommodation)

EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodland)

SPG/SPD

A Design Guide to House Extensions SPD 2021

Tree Strategy 2021

The current version of the Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) turned five years old on Tuesday 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan are considered still up to date. However, the rest need to be considered for updating to reflect changing circumstances and national policy. A consultation version of the draft update of the Local Plan was published on 6th November 2024.

Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become “out of date” when they are five years old. It is a matter of planning judgement rather than legal fact whether a plan or policies within it are out-of-date. This will depend on whether they have been overtaken by things that have happened since the plan was adopted, either on the ground or through changes in national policy, for example. Officer advice in respect of the Local Plan policies pertinent to these applications listed above is that they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remains very similar in the draft updated Local Plan. Therefore, they can continue to be afforded weight in the determination of this planning application and are not considered to be ‘out of date’.

5. APPRAISAL

Character and Appearance

Policy H9 states that alterations, such as fencing associated with existing properties, will be acceptable where it respects the character of the site, uses materials and a design that respects the character of the site and the pattern of neighbouring properties and the street as a whole and the street as a whole in terms of scale, location, materials and design, and any important existing building line. Policy CC7 also sets out relevant considerations for design.

The application site, being a corner site, relates to both Albert Road, and Chelford Way. Albert Road is characterised by larger dwellings set within significant plots. Generally, these larger dwellings have significant setback to Albert Road and brick walls (maximum ~1.5m), entrance gates, and dense hedging or vegetation toward Albert Road. Corner properties, to their secondary frontage have a mix of brick walls ~1.8m and closed boarded fencing ~1.8-2m. Chelford Way is a modern development leading to Orwell Close constructed in a regular form and building line, with no front boundary fencing. At the corners of Orwell Close and Chelford Way, the properties have 1.8m high fencing set within large setbacks in line with the general building line of the those properties on Chelford Way. The subject property previously contained a very low level brick wall >1m high to Chelford Way for the depth of the existing building, and beyond that contained a ~1.8m tall closed boarded fence. Though not of a great aesthetic, the original fence was set within a landscaped setting, and contained a number of trees behind which provided relief. All vegetation not subject to a Tree Preservation Order has been cleared from the site.

The original grassed area to the Albert Road frontage and landscaping to Chelford Way provided a soft verdant edge closest to the highways that contributed to the open appearance of the street. The wall would appear incongruous and unduly harm the open semi-park like character and appearance of the site and area.

The proposal, by reason of its excessive height and extent, and prominent siting, together with its inappropriate appearance has resulted in a obtrusive addition to the street scene that detracts significantly from the open and landscaped character and appearance of the site and surrounding area. As such, the proposal is contrary to Policies CC7 and H9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and Supplementary Planning Document Design Guide to House Extensions (2021) and Paragraph 135 of NPPF 2024.



Figure 1 - 2009 streetview image of site



Figure 2 - November 2022 streetview image of site (including currently unauthorised fencing)

Trees

Part 'b' of Policy EN12 indicates that all development sites should not result in a net loss of biodiversity or geodiversity. Works to facilitate the construction of the hoarding appear to have taken place after 2021.



Figure 3 - 2021 Streetview image of site

Schedule 7A, paragraph 6 of the Town and Country Planning Act states that if activities on land on or after 30 January 2020 has taken place other than in accordance with a planning permission and as a result the biodiversity value of the onsite habitat is lower than it would otherwise have been, the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat is to be taken to be its biodiversity value immediately before the carrying on of the activities. No information has been provided to address these policy requirements. The proposal has resulted in a significant loss of on-site biodiversity, and has failed to demonstrate no net loss contrary to the Local Plan policy EN12.

The works do not appear to cause issue to the multiple Tree Protection Order trees on the site. The landscaping and setting to the building contributed positively to the visual amenity of the street and complements the open landscaped character of the area. Enclosing the entire site in such a way would be unacceptable on visual amenity and character grounds. The proposals are contrary to Policies CC7 and EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

6. CONCLUSION

The proposed development has been assessed as set out above and is not considered to be acceptable for the reasons detailed.

7. RECOMMENDATION

Refuse.