
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 August 1026

by E Pickernell BSc MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 September 2026

Appeal Ref: 6004809

1029 Oxford Road, Tilehurst, Reading RG31 6TL

- 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 Chris Thorpe of Chesters Place Limited against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/25/0102.
 - The development proposed is the development of new building to provide 2 no. 2 bedroom and 6 no. 1 bedroom flats along with the creation of 6 parking spaces and associated landscaping following the demolition of the existing building.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs has been made by Chris Thorpe against Reading Borough Council. This is the subject of a separate decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. I have taken the description of development in the banner heading above from the decision notice as it more accurately reflects the scheme as shown on the plans upon which the decision was made, omitting words which do not relate to an act of development.
4. Revised plans have been submitted with the appeal which indicate the provision of additional parking spaces, and revised landscaping within the area to the front of the proposed building. In this instance, the amendments would result in material changes to the scheme which have the potential to introduce fresh issues. Furthermore, the proposed amendments would conflict with the description of development and have not been the subject of consultation. Therefore, accepting the revised plans would result in procedural unfairness. Consequently, I have considered the appeal on the basis of the plans upon which the Council made their decision.
5. A new National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published in August 2026. The Council and appellant were invited to make further comments, and I have taken these submissions into account in making my decision.
6. A signed Unilateral Undertaking (UU) has been submitted which contains obligations in respect of affordable housing contributions. As this was finalised prior to my determination of the appeal, I have taken it into account. I return to this matter later in my decision.

Main Issues

7. The main issues are:

- the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area;
- the effect of the proposal on the living conditions of the occupiers of 1031 Oxford Road and the future occupiers of 1025 – 1027 Oxford Road in respect of visual dominance and privacy;
- whether the proposed development would provide adequate living conditions for future occupiers in respect of privacy, visual dominance, daylight and sunlight;
- the effect of the proposal on highway safety in respect of whether adequate parking and turning would be provided and the free flow of traffic;
- whether the proposed flats would adequately contribute to meeting identified housing needs in the area;
- whether the proposed development would make adequate provision for affordable housing.

Reasons

Character and appearance

8. The appeal site comprises a two-storey building containing 4 flats. It is set in an elevated position above the adjacent road and has a parking area and some landscaping to the front and garden at the rear which continues to rise.
9. The majority of the properties on the southwest side of Oxford Road, in the vicinity of the appeal site comprise detached buildings in generous plots. These are primarily two storeys in height and some benefit from additional accommodation within the roof space served by dormer windows.
10. There is some variety in the form and style of nearby dwellings, however there is a degree of consistency in terms of the set back from the street and several of the properties share architectural characteristics including bay windows and projecting gables. Although the ridge line is not wholly consistent amongst the nearby buildings on the southwest side of Oxford Road, overall, they rise to the northwest to follow the topography of the adjacent street.
11. To the southeast the appeal site is adjoined by a currently vacant plot which has consent for two blocks of flats, the parties agree that work has commenced and as such the permission is extant.
12. On the opposite side of Oxford Road there are several commercial buildings and associated car parking along with some three-storey blocks of flats which adjoin the railway line to the rear. Tilehurst Railway Station and car park is located to the southeast of the appeal site.
13. Consequently, the overall character of the area is mixed, although the immediate context of the appeal site is residential and relatively regular in character and the existing building and site layout is typical of this.

14. It is proposed to demolish the existing building and to replace it with a new three storey building containing 8 flats; the upper floor accommodated within the resultant roof space. In front of the building, it is proposed to provide 6 parking spaces.
15. Presently, the height of the ridgeline of the appeal property sits between that of the existing building at 1031 Oxford Road and both the proposed and existing buildings to the southeast. By contrast the proposed building would be significantly taller than the existing building and the ridge height would exceed that of the adjacent properties. As such the proposal would conflict with the prevailing pattern of development in the area, resulting in an incongruous and jarring form of development.
16. The proposed building would be closer to the northwest boundary of the appeal site than the main part of the existing building (not including the existing single storey element). Although there are other properties in the area which sit a similar distance from their boundaries, the use of hipped roofs and reductions in scale near to the boundaries mean that overall, a sense of space between and around the buildings is generally maintained. However, due to its overall size, mass and height combined with its proximity to the boundaries, the proposed building would appear excessively scaled and squeezed into its plot resulting in a cramped form of development which would detract from the character and appearance of the area.
17. Furthermore, the proposed building would have two front facing gables, which together would occupy the majority of the front elevation. These would be relatively wide and would extend to three storeys in height with the gabled roofs projecting from the eaves and ridge. These would be prominent and imposing elements within the streetscene, exacerbated by their elevated position in relation to the street, which would appear incongruous and jarring.
18. I recognise that the approved building to the southeast of the appeal site would be relatively wide, would include a second storey accommodated in the roof and would have front facing gables. However, a generous space would remain between the two blocks and the roofs would be hipped, which would provide a greater sense of space between and around the two buildings. Furthermore, the size and scale of both the main roof and that of the front facing gables would be much smaller. As such the overall appearance of the approved buildings would be much less imposing and incongruous in the streetscene than the proposed scheme.
19. The Council also has concerns about the design of the rear section of the proposed building. Whilst it contributes to the overall scale of the building, it is stepped in and down from the front element and has hipped roofs, albeit concealing elements of flat roof. As such it represents a somewhat recessive element in comparison with the main bulk of the building. The dormer windows would be set well in from the edges of the roof and the fenestration on the rear elevation would not be widely visible and would not conflict significantly with that of other dwellings in the area.
20. However, overall, I conclude that the proposal would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (Adopted November 2019) (LP), which

seeks to ensure that development proposals are of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area in terms of, amongst other things, layout, urban grain, scale, height and massing.

21. The reason for refusal refers to Policy H11 of the LP, however this refers to development within a garden and as such has not been determinative in my consideration of this main issue.

Living conditions – neighbouring occupiers

22. The proposed building contains side facing bedroom windows on the first floor. In the northwest elevation, the bedroom window would face several existing windows on the first floor side elevation of 1031 Oxford Road. Future occupiers would have clear views of these windows, at close quarters which would result in an unacceptable loss of privacy to the rooms which these windows serve compared with the existing windows which are set further away from the boundary.
23. Furthermore, given the overall size and mass of the proposed building along with the proximity to the boundary, it would also result in a harmful overbearing impact when viewed from these windows
24. Whilst there is some vegetation along the boundary between the appeal site and 1031 Oxford Road, this would not be sufficient to eliminate overlooking and there is no guarantee that this would remain present in perpetuity. The absence of an objection from the occupier(s) of this dwelling does not lead me to an alternative finding.
25. The main garden area of 1031 Oxford Road is to the rear of the property. Downward views from the proposed bedroom window would be at an oblique angle and would look towards the side return area of 1031 Oxford Road and is therefore unlikely to result in a significant loss of privacy in respect of the amenity space.
26. The first-floor bedroom windows on the southeast elevation of the proposed building would look towards the currently vacant site. Based on the evidence before me the approved scheme would contain windows in the northwest elevation. Given the position of these windows and their proximity to the boundary, closer than the side facing windows in the existing building, they would have an adverse impact on the privacy of the future occupiers of the adjacent building. In addition, due to the overall size and scale of the side elevation in close proximity to the boundary, the proposed building would be a dominating feature which would have an overbearing impact when viewed from side facing windows of the consented scheme.
27. Overall, I conclude that the proposal would result in harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of 1031 Oxford Road and the future occupiers of 1025 – 1027 Oxford Road in respect of outlook and privacy. It would therefore conflict with Policy CC8 of the LP which seeks to ensure that development proposals do not cause a detrimental impact on living conditions of existing properties in respect of, amongst other things, privacy, overlooking, visual dominance and overbearing impact.
28. For the reasons given above, Policy H11 has not been determinative in my consideration of this main issue.

Living conditions – future occupiers

29. The bedroom windows within the proposed scheme which would result in the overlooking of the neighbouring properties, as discussed above, would conversely result in a lack of privacy within the rooms which they serve.
30. The bedroom windows of flats 1 and 4 of the proposed development would look onto the side elevation of the approved building. Based on the evidence before me, this building would be sizeable with a relatively deep plan resulting in an imposing side elevation in close proximity to these proposed windows. This would result in a visually dominant and overbearing effect upon the occupiers of these dwellings when experienced from the bedrooms. This would result in poor living conditions for the occupiers of these dwellings.
31. The ground floor flat adjacent to the side access (Flat 1) would have two bedroom windows directly adjacent to this walkway. Residents accessing bins and bikes would pass along this walkway. This would result in a degree of overlooking to these windows, however it would be fleeting as residents pass by. Furthermore, it would only be other residents of the appeal scheme which would utilise this access and as such its use would not be frequent. Consequently, whilst I find that the proposed arrangement would result in some overlooking to these windows the harm which would arise as a result would be limited.
32. Flat 3 would be located at the rear of the proposed building on the ground floor would have a small private garden area to the rear. Due to the topography of the site the remainder of the garden, which would be communal, would be set at a higher position. However, the plan indicates that a landscaped screen would be provided along the boundary between these two areas. Whilst some overlooking of this space may still occur from areas such as the adjacent stairs, this would not be significant.
33. The Juliet balcony of flat 6 on the first floor would also be visible from the communal garden area, however it is set in from the ground floor and would be a generous distance from this communal area. As such I consider that the occupiers of flats 3 and 6 would have adequate privacy.
34. The kitchen/living rooms of Flats 1, 2, 4 and 5 would have windows on the northeast elevation of the proposed building. The Council has concerns in respect of the provision of daylight and sunlight to these flats. The rooms in question would benefit from bay windows which would include a significant amount of glazing. Although these rooms would not benefit from direct sunlight throughout the day due to their orientation, they would nevertheless receive sufficient day light to provide a satisfactory standard of living.
35. Although in some respects I find that the proposal would provide adequate living conditions for future occupiers, overall, I conclude that the proposal would not provide adequate living conditions in respect of privacy and visual dominance of the side facing bedrooms. It would therefore conflict with Policy CC8 of the LP which seeks to ensure that development does not cause unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties in terms of privacy, overlooking, visual dominance and overbearing effects of development.

36. The reason for refusal refers to Policy H5 of the LP, however this refers to standards for new housing, none of which relates to the areas of concern. As such, this policy has not been determinative in respect of this main issue.

Highway safety

37. The appeal scheme would provide 6 parking spaces located to the front of the proposed building.
38. The Council's Revised Parking Standards and Design Supplementary Planning Document (Adopted October 2011) (SPD) indicates that the appeal site would fall within Zone 3. In this zone the SPD suggests that 1.5 spaces would be required for each 1 or 2 bedroom flat which would equate to 10 spaces for the proposed development. These standards have been informed by census data from April 2001, updated March 2007. More recent data indicates that locally car ownership is 1.17 vehicles for a 1 bed unit and 0.93 for a 2 bed unit. Were these ownership levels to be replicated on the appeal site there would be a shortfall in provision.
39. However, the appeal site is within walking distance of bus stops and Tilehurst Train Station which would provide an alternative means of transport to access employment, services and facilities. Oxford Road is also part of the North West Reading Cycle Route and the scheme would include cycle parking provision. As such cycling would also be a viable means of transport in this location. Furthermore, some local services and facilities exist within a reasonable walking distance of the site.
40. Consequently, although the proposal would result in a shortfall in parking provision when assessed against both the SPD and more recent data, the appeal site is in a location where realistic alternatives to car ownership are possible, meaning not all future residents would require a car.
41. Moreover, the nearby road network is subject to parking controls, meaning that displaced vehicles would not be able to park inappropriately in the vicinity of the appeal site. Therefore, the proposal would not result in harm to free flow of traffic in the area. As such, in this instance I find the proposed parking provision to be sufficient for the proposed development.
42. Plans were submitted during the course of the application indicating the provision of a turning area within the appeal site. This would ensure that residents would be able to turn within the site and as such could emerge safely onto the road. The Council have suggested that this should indicate sufficient space to turn a small delivery vehicle. However, I have not been directed to any policy which suggests that this is a requirement.
43. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would not result in harm to highway safety in respect of whether adequate parking and turning would be provided and the free flow of traffic. It would therefore accord with Policies TR1 and TR3 of the LP which together seek to ensure that developments contribute towards meeting sustainable transport objectives and are not detrimental to highway safety.

Housing needs

44. Policy H2 of the LP seeks to ensure that, wherever possible, residential development should contribute towards meeting the needs for the mix of housing set out in figure 4.6 of the plan, in particular for family homes of three or more

bedrooms. This indicates that for market dwellings, the greatest need is for 2- and 3-bedroom dwellings.

45. In respect of major developments of 10 or more units, Policy H2 states that, outside of the central area and defined centres, a minimum of 50% of dwellings will be of 3 bedrooms or more. However, there is no such requirement for development of less than 10 dwellings.
46. The appeal scheme would not result in the provision of any 3-bedroom dwellings. However, the existing building does not contain any 2- or 3-bedroom dwellings and as such the appeal scheme would increase the provision of 2-bedroom dwellings which could be occupied by a small family.
47. Furthermore, the Policy states that schemes should contribute to meeting the need for 3-bedroom dwellings 'where possible'. Given the relatively modest size of the site its scope to make a material contribution to the number of family sized dwellings would be limited.
48. Therefore, in this instance I consider that the proposed flats would adequately contribute to meeting identified housing needs in the area. It would therefore accord with Policy H2 of the LP.

Affordable housing

49. Policy H3 of the LP states that for sites of 5 – 9 dwellings, a financial contribution will be made that will enable the equivalent of 20% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough. The Council's Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (Adopted March 2021) states that the most appropriate way to calculate the contribution is to calculate the Gross Development Value (GDV) of the entire proposed development. The 20% contribution required by H3 would equate to 10% of the GDV of the development.
50. Policy H3 goes on to say that where proposals fall short of the policy target as a result of viability considerations, an open-book approach will be taken, and the onus will be on the developer to clearly demonstrate the circumstances justifying a lower affordable housing contribution.
51. The appellant has prepared a Viability Report¹ which was reviewed on behalf of the Council through a Financial Viability Assessment Report². The parties differ in terms of certain inputs to the viability appraisal, particularly in respect of the calculation of land value. Nevertheless, whilst the report prepared for the Council considers the appellant's assessment overstated, it concludes that the scheme is unviable and unable to support policy compliant affordable housing contributions. I have no reason to disagree with this conclusion.
52. Through the submitted UU the appellant has proposed a deferred affordable housing contribution mechanism whereby, the owner would pay 50% of the sales value achieved, or estimated sales values, in excess of £2,205,000 (the current market value) to a maximum of £220,500. I note that this mechanism utilises the GDV as calculated within the Council's report and that the report also recommended review mechanisms to capture any uplift in value over the course of the development.

¹ Viability Report prepared by Sturt and Company dated 11 April 2025.

² Review of Applicant's Financial Viability Assessment prepared by Carter Jonas dated June 2025

53. The Affordable Housing SPD sets out a methodology for the calculation of deferred contributions and there is no evidence before me that this approach has not been followed in this instance. As such I find that the proposal would not conflict with Policy H3 or the advice in the SPD in this regard.
54. The Council has concerns in respect of the accuracy and enforceability of the UU which the appellant has sought to address. However, as I am dismissing the appeal and the UU will not come into effect, I have not considered these matters further.

Planning Balance

55. Policy S4 of the Framework states that development proposals within settlements should be approved unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects, when assessed against the national decision-making policies in the Framework. The circumstances in which the benefits of approving development are likely to be substantially outweighed by the adverse effects include (amongst other things) situations where the proposal would fail to comply with one of the national decision-making policies which states that development proposals should be refused in specific circumstances.
56. The parties agree that the Council cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply with supply said to sit at approximately 3.55 years. The proposal would result in a net increase of 4 dwellings. Policy HO7 of the Framework states that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of providing homes which would meet an evidenced need. Furthermore, Policy L2 of the Framework states that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of creating additional homes within existing plots. However, it goes on to state that such proposals should be consistent with the overall street scene and maintain acceptable living standards for residents and neighbours. For the reasons given, the proposal would not fulfil these criteria.
57. As supported by Policy L3 of the Framework, the proposal would make efficient use of previously developed land and increase the density of the area in a location with good access to services, facilities and sustainable transport options. The proposal would also bring about the usual economic benefits associated with construction. Overall, I attach significant positive weight to these benefits. I attach limited weight to the provision of affordable housing, given its delivery is uncertain.
58. However, I have found that the proposal would result in harm in respect of the living conditions of existing and future occupiers and harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with Policies CC7 and CC8 of the LP. These harms would be substantial and long lasting.
59. These policies are consistent with Policies DP3, P3 and L2 of the Framework which require proposals to respond to their context so that they integrate with their surroundings and are appropriate for their locations, taking into account the likely effect on living conditions, ensuring that acceptable living standards are maintained. I therefore attach significant weight to the conflict with these policies.
60. Policy DP3(3) of the Framework states that development proposals should be refused if, without clear justification, they conflict with paragraph 1 of the policy or relevant aspects of the principles in paragraph 2 of the policy, or within any explicit design standards set out in the development plan. I find conflict with DP3(1)

because the proposal does not respond to its context in order to integrate with its surroundings.

61. Therefore, in this case the benefits would not substantially outweigh the adverse effects, when assessed against the national decision-making policies in the Framework.

Conclusion

62. For the reasons given above, the proposal conflicts with the development plan and the material considerations, including the Framework, do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

E Pickernell

INSPECTOR