

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 August 2016

by Michael Evans BA MA MPhil DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 11 August 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/D/16/3150501
121 Highgrove Street, Reading RG1 5EJ

- 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 Ms Siobhan Murray-Whetton against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 160171 was refused by notice dated 14 April 2016.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as a two storey rear extension with loft conversion and internal alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

2. The main issues in this appeal are: firstly, the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the locality and streetscene and, secondly, the effect on the living conditions of the occupiers of the adjacent dwellings at 119 and 123 Highgrove Street, with particular regard to overlooking, light levels and whether the extended dwelling would appear overbearing.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal concerns a two storey semi-detached dwelling of fairly modest bulk. While there is some variation in design in the street as a whole, it is one of a number of adjacent properties on the same side with hipped roofs, which give a pleasant sense of regularity in this part. The development referred to by the Appellant, such as the roof extension at 112 Highgrove Street, nearby parking and mixed retail/flats and commercial premises are not within this row of properties, which provide the immediate context.
 4. In these circumstances the resultant gable end would unbalance the overall symmetrical form of the pair of dwellings and disrupt the rhythm of the streetscene. At the rear the part single and part two storey extension would span the full width of the dwelling. The ridge of the two storey part of this addition would be only minimally lower than that of the host dwelling, with its eaves level being noticeably above that of the main roof. As a result and despite the hipped end at the rear, the additions would appear overly dominant, rather than being subservient. The impact of the development
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would be noticeably greater than the fairly modest single storey rear extension to the attached property. The three relatively large ground floor windows at the side would relate poorly to the general height and position of the existing openings in the host and adjacent dwellings.

5. Due to these factors, excessive bulk would be added to the dwelling, at odds with the scale, proportions and detailed design of the host dwelling and adjacent properties. In consequence, the enlarged dwelling would be an unacceptably dominant and discordant presence, with the character and appearance of the locality, as well as the streetscene, being harmed.
6. The rear projection would not be visible from the street but its detrimental effect would be readily apparent from the adjacent gardens. In any event, the suggestion that acceptability should be conferred on the basis of limited visibility seems to me to be an implicit acknowledgement of the inappropriate nature of the scheme.
7. The development would fail to maintain the character of the area and respond positively to its context, contrary to these aims of Core Strategy 2008, Policy CS7. The extended dwelling would not respect the character of the neighbouring properties and the street, in conflict with Sites and Detailed Policies Document (SDPD) 2012, Policy DM9.
8. There would be conflict with the general advice in the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), A Design Guide to House Extensions, regarding the need to take account of the character of the street. The Appellant draws my attention to the illustration of a rear extension on page 6 of the SPG. However, that now proposed would span the full width of the rear elevation, as opposed to only about half as shown in the drawing. The illustration also shows an addition with the same eaves level as the host dwelling and not higher as in the appeal scheme.
9. I am reinforced in my view regarding the detrimental impact of the development by the importance placed on design in the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework). It is a core principle of the Framework that planning should always seek to secure high quality design, which would not be achieved in this instance. Moreover, it is indicated that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and is indivisible from good planning.

Living conditions

10. At first floor level the rear extension would not project beyond a line taken at 45 degrees from the centre of the adjacent window at the attached dwelling, 123 Highgrove Street. Given this relationship I consider that the extent of rearward projection would be insufficient to result in any undue loss of light or result in an overbearing appearance, despite the eaves height and the development abutting the boundary.
11. The adjacent dwelling at 119 is set back from the boundary, as is the host dwelling. The hipped end at first floor level and fairly modest height of the single storey part would significantly limit the effect, despite the neighbouring property being at a lower level. In consequence, there would be no significant loss of light or overbearing impact at this dwelling either.
12. The ground floor windows in the flank of the extension would be in fairly close proximity to the boundary fence and the adjacent garden at no. 119. Because

of their height and size, despite being at the ground floor and the lower level of the adjacent property, they would project significantly above the top of the boundary fence, as shown on the submitted drawings. As a result, they would give rise to unacceptable overlooking of the neighbouring dwelling.

13. The Appellant suggests that they could have obscured glazing to prevent this. However, their undue proximity, size and number would still result in the windows being an intrusive presence, with the adjacent occupiers having an unacceptable perception of being overlooked in a position where a higher standard of amenity might reasonably be expected. Furthermore, the glare of internal lighting would serve to exacerbate and highlight this adverse impact.
14. The Council has expressed no concerns in relation to the glazed roof of the single storey part or the side rooflight and I see no reason to object to these given their position and orientation. However, as a result of the ground floor flank windows the living conditions of the adjacent occupiers at no. 119 Highgrove Street would be harmed. In consequence, there would be conflict with SDPD Policy DM4, which seeks to prevent such adverse effects.
15. There would also be conflict with the core principle of the Framework that planning should always seek to secure a good standard of amenity for existing occupants of buildings.

Other considerations

16. The scheme follows pre-application advice from the Council, with the initial proposal amended to attempt to address this. However, this does not, in itself, confer acceptability and I must consider the appeal on its own merits. I see no reason to disagree with the view of the Council that because of the distance from them there would be no harm to the setting of the adjacent Christchurch Conservation Area or to that of Listed Buildings in Christchurch Road.
17. The Appellant claims that the property could be enlarged using permitted development rights and a drawing showing this has been submitted. However, there is no Certificate of Lawfulness to demonstrate that this is the case. Furthermore, it seems to me that as this appeal is being pursued there is at least some doubt over the attractiveness of this alternative to the Appellant and therefore the likelihood of it being built anyway. Moreover, there would be noticeably lesser bulk at first floor level at the rear with a consequently less disharmonious relationship with the host dwelling. In consequence, I am not persuaded that this is a matter that should be afforded any significant weight.
18. The explanatory text to Policy DM9 indicates that extensions can be an alternative to moving to a larger property, often in a less accessible location. However, it is also made clear that extensions can cause major planning issues which must be addressed in policy, while I have found conflict with Policy DM9 itself. Nevertheless, it is indicated that the development is sought to enable the family to remain in the local area where the children attend schools and the Appellant has other community ties. This is said to be necessary because of a lack of larger affordable housing.
19. However, there is no clear explanation as to why the existing three bedroom dwelling might be considered deficient or any detailed evidence in relation to housing availability. In any event, it is likely that the development would remain long after the personal circumstances used to justify it would cease to

apply. Given the detrimental effects that would result, I consider that rejecting the appeal would be both proportionate and necessary.

Conclusion

20. Taking account of all other matters raised, there are no considerations sufficient to justify permitting the proposal and the appeal fails.

M Evans

INSPECTOR