
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 November 2016

by Veronica Bond LLB (Hons), Solicitor (non-practising)

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

Decision date: 21st November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/D/16/3157693

15 Newlands Avenue, Caversham, Reading RG4 8NS

- 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 James Lynch against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 160663, dated 10 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 22 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is single storey rear and two storey side extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The appellant has submitted revised plans with the appeal. However, in the interests of fairness and decisions being taken locally where possible, I base my determination on the plans which were before the Council when it took its decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host property and area.

Reasons

4. The appeal property is a semi-detached dwelling with bays at ground and first floor level. A single storey garage building extends out to the neighbouring boundary. The adjoining property at 17 Newlands Avenue shares broadly the same design but has a side dormer window and larger front porch also. At 11 and 13 Newlands Avenue are another pair of semi-detached dwellings, of a very similar original design but which have been extended to the side with no set down at roof level or set back from the front elevation.
5. The area has a distinctive open character. This is created in part by the spacing between properties and presence of more modest scaled bungalows, as well as by the road and pavement widths, and grass verges.
6. The proposal would include a two storey side extension of substantial width, relative to the existing house, and which would not be set down at roof level or set back from the front. It would not appear as a subordinate extension, but rather would dominate the original house. It would detract from the existing bay features and unbalance the pair of semi-detached houses. The side extension would reduce the spacious 'Avenue' feel of the street and would

- increase the sense of enclosure created by existing development at Nos 11 and 13. This would be particularly apparent in views of the two pairs of semi-detached properties together.
7. I have considered the appellant's view that the bend in the road and position of No 15 means that there is currently no perception of a break in built form, and that the current spacing is only apparent when directly in front of the property. However, whilst I acknowledge that this positioning would reduce the prominence of the proposed side extension to a degree, its substantial form would still remain clearly apparent in views from the public domain.
 8. I acknowledge that the extension would not be higher than the existing house and would not extend forward of the front building line as per Nos 11 and 13. The appellant has also indicated that the proposed side extension was designed to respect the existing house and neighbouring semi-detached properties, and that a lack of subservience does not necessarily equate to harm. Nonetheless, I have found that the proposal would appear as a dominant additional mass, which would reduce openness, for the reasons identified. Given also the substantial scale of the proposed side extension, the gap which would be created at ground floor level and spacing at first floor level would not overcome the resultant sense of enclosure.
 9. I accept that properties in the area are varied in style but this is not a justification for a design which would harm the locally distinctive spacious character. The side dormer window and porch to No 17 are far more modestly sized and do not have a comparable impact in terms of the symmetry of Nos 15 and 17.
 10. I conclude therefore on the main issue that the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the host property and area. It would conflict with Policy CS7 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy (adopted January 2008 – with alteration adopted 27 January 2015) and with and Policy DM9 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Sites and Detailed Policies Document (adopted October 2012 – with alteration adopted 27 January 2015). These include in their aims seeking development of a high design quality which responds positively to local context; and extensions which respect the character of the house and of neighbouring properties and the street as a whole.
 11. It would be contrary also to the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance – A Design Guide for House Extensions (May 2003), which includes similar underlying aims to those in the development plan policies cited. I acknowledge the appellant's concerns as to the authority and relevance of this document. I accept also that there would be elements of compliance, and that it is not intended to be inflexibly applied. These aspects do not though overcome the development plan conflict found in any event.

Other Matters

12. I have taken into account the appellant's comments as to the living accommodation requirements of the family and benefits of the proposed side extension, along with the supportive comments in the reasoned justification to Policy DM9 and in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). I note also issues relating to alternative designs. These aspects offer slight support in favour of the proposal.

13. The appellant cites a possible fall-back position as regards permitted development rights. I have no evidence though to indicate any real likelihood of those being exercised as an alternative to the appeal proposal and thus this is due only limited weight.
14. The absence of harm to living conditions of neighbours and parking arrangements is only a neutral matter. I acknowledge that support was originally offered by the case officer dealing with the application but this does not alter my views above. Concerns as to the handling of the application are not for me in dealing with this appeal.
15. I sympathise with the appellant's feeling that the existing development at Nos 11 and 13 and absence of a similar proposal at No 17 has adversely affected the application. I do not have full details of the planning circumstances leading to the developments at No 11 and 13 but have based my decision on the evidence before me and site context as seen at my site visit.

Conclusion

16. I have found that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the host property and area and thus I do not find it to be the sustainable development in respect of which the Framework creates a presumption in favour. For the above reasons, and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should fail.

Veronica Bond
INSPECTOR