

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 January 2017

by Les Greenwood MRTPI

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

Decision date: 26 January 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/D/16/3163447

The Shanty, 145 The Warren, Caversham, Reading RG4 7TQ

- 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 Mr and Mrs J Malhi against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 160802 was refused by notice dated 26 August 2016.
 - The development proposed is alterations and extensions to a dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

2. The main issues are the effects of the proposal on:
 - i) the character and appearance of the house and the local area, including the impact on trees;
 - ii) living conditions at neighbouring properties; and
 - iii) flood risk to future occupiers of the house and others.

Procedural matter

3. I have considered the appeal on the basis of the amended plans submitted during the application process.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The Warren is a long, single track, semi-rural lane running along the top of a short escarpment on the northern side of the Thames. The river side of the street is lined by individually designed detached houses, mostly split level with their upper floors facing on to The Warren and with 2 or more storeys to the rear, facing the river. The Shanty is fairly typical in this respect, a brick and tile 3 storey house with only the top floor fronting onto The Warren. It is, as suggested by the appellant, a little tired in appearance.
 5. The proposal aims to refurbish and improve the existing house in a more contemporary design including 2 relatively small scale 2 storey extensions at the back, a 2 storey extension to one side and a small top floor extension at
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the front. The existing rear ground floor and first floor terraces would also be extended, other alterations made and a garage added to the front of the house. The Council accepts that contemporary design is appropriate here, but objects to the particular design proposed.

6. The existing house has varied roof lines and angles, which combined with site level changes make it look somewhat disorderly in some views. The proposal would on one hand help to improve the roofscape by replacing the existing profile tiles with slates, giving the building much cleaner lines. On the other hand, however, it would also introduce several new roof slopes without establishing any clear overall form. The result would, in my view, be a cluttered, disharmonious design that would not resolve into a coherent whole. The extended house would therefore stand out unattractively from the other, more simply designed houses in this row, as seen in views from The Warren, the river and the other side of the river.
7. The rear elevation as proposed would contain much more glass than existing. This is only to be expected in such an area, to take advantage of the views to the river and beyond. I see no objection to this in itself, nor to the scale of the proposed extensions which are all modest in size. Moreover, The Warren is characterised in part by garages to the front of houses, so that part of the proposal also seems acceptable in design terms.
8. The Council raises no objection to the proposed loss of a small tree at the front of the house, but is concerned about the potential impact on trees to the rear including a small-leaved lime tree which is subject to a Tree Preservation Order. It considers that a tree survey should have been submitted. The lime tree, is, however, far enough away from the development that it should not be harmed so long as standard tree protection measures are implemented. Although trees in general do add substantially to the character of the area, I saw no others here which are important in themselves. I am satisfied that trees could be adequately protected without the need for a tree survey.
9. Although aspects of the proposal would therefore preserve and even enhance local character, I find that the harm from changes to the roof form would outweigh any benefits. Taken as a whole, I conclude that the proposal would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of both the house and the local area. It therefore conflicts with the aims of Core Strategy (CS) Policies CS7, CS8 and CS38 and Sites and Detailed Policies Document (SDPD) Policy DM9, to ensure that all extensions are of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area – particularly in the vicinity of waterways - respecting the character of the house and the pattern of neighbouring properties and protecting trees from damage.
10. Likewise the proposal conflicts with the National Planning Policy Framework's emphasis on securing high quality design that reinforces local distinctiveness. I also find conflict with the aim of the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance *Design Guidance for The Warren, Caversham*, to protect the special character of this particular area.

Neighbours' living conditions

11. The proposed front extension and especially the new garage would be close to and much higher than a front, north-facing, habitable room window at Riverlea next door. Although there is already vegetation here, this is softer and more permeable, allowing some light and views through. In contrast the proposed new elements at the front would overshadow and loom over the window to an extent which would be oppressive, adding to the impact of Riverlea's own existing garage.
12. To the rear, the small extensions and the revised terrace arrangement would have comparatively little effect on the rear windows, terraces and gardens of either Riverlea or the house to the other side, No 147. Both of these houses would retain wide, open, sunny southern aspects. All 3 houses already have terraces at first floor level, overlooking each other and each other's gardens. The proposed re-plan of the first floor terrace at The Shanty would not change this situation substantively. There would be some minor additional overlooking of Riverlea's rear terrace, but this could be controlled by a requirement for a strategically positioned side screen.
13. I conclude that the proposed elements of this proposal to the front of the house would unacceptably harm living conditions at Riverlea, due to overbearing and overshadowing effects. The proposal therefore conflicts with the aims of SDPD Policy DM4 and the Framework, to secure a good standard of amenity for all occupants of buildings, avoiding significant detrimental impact to the living environment.

Flood risk

14. The lower part of the site, including much of the footprint of the house, is situated in Flood Zone 3b, the functional flood plain of the Thames, where flooding is to be expected from time to time. Flood risk from this main river needs careful consideration. The Planning Practice Guidance advises that decision-makers should ensure that development is appropriately flood resilient and resistant, safe for its users for the development's lifetime and will not increase flood risk overall.
15. I note that CS Policy CS35 exempts small-scale householder developments from its general restriction on development in high risk flood areas, though this does not necessarily mean that such development is acceptable. The Planning Practice Guidance advises that site-specific flood risk assessments should always be proportionate to the degree of flood risk. For example, where the development is an extension to an existing house which would not significantly increase the number of people present in an area at risk of flooding, the local planning authority would generally need a less detailed assessment to be able to reach an informed decision on the planning application.
16. The appellants have submitted a householder development flood risk form, which is sufficient in many lower risk situations. Even bearing in mind the above advice, however, a greater amount of detail is needed here, identifying issues such as the likely occurrence, depth and speed of flooding and taking climate change into account. Recommendations would be needed in respect of

appropriate mitigation and resilience measures to protect people and property both on and off-site.

17. I note that the intention is for the new ground floor terrace to have open space underneath in order to reduce floodwater displacement. This would no doubt be helpful, but a more complete risk assessment is still required.
18. I conclude that it has not been adequately demonstrated that the proposal would not result in significantly increased risk of flooding to the property itself or dwellings beyond the site boundary. The proposal therefore conflicts with the Framework's public safety aims and the advice of the Planning Practice Guidance.

Other matters

19. I have considered all other matters raised. In particular, though I note that the proposed garage would restrict drivers' visibility onto The Warren, this would not cause significant danger to highway users. This situation is commonplace here, traffic speeds are necessarily low and traffic volumes appear to be light. I acknowledge that the construction of these extensions would cause some temporary disturbance to neighbours, but this could partly be controlled by appropriate conditions and would not justify a refusal. I find no other issues which would add significantly to the objections already stated.

Conclusion

20. Although I have found in favour of the proposal in some respects, the planning balance is clearly against it. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

Les Greenwood

INSPECTOR