

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 April 2017

by Debbie Moore BSc (HONS) MCD MRTPI PGDip

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

Decision date: 26 April 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/16/3162984

The Woodley Arms Public House, Waldeck Street, Reading RG1 2RF

- 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 Richard Burlton of Lainston Woodley Arms LLP against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 160558, dated 22 March 2016, was refused by notice dated 25 July 2016.
 - The development proposed is described as “erection of a block of 40 studio student apartments including parking, amenity space and landscaping following demolition of existing public house”.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. Revised plans were submitted during the course of the application, in particular the number of apartments was reduced to 38. I have taken the description of development given above from the application form. However, it is clear from the Council’s decision notice that the decision was taken on the basis of the following revised plans: 13A, 14A, 15A, 16A, 17A, 18A and 2031/1. I have, therefore, considered the scheme on the basis of the revised plans.
3. There was a previous appeal on the site for a development of 40 studio student apartments (the 2016 appeal).¹ The main issues in that appeal are similar to the appeal before me, and the decision is relatively recent. Consequently, I attach significant weight to the 2016 appeal.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are the effect of the development on: (i) the character and appearance of the area; (ii) the living conditions of future occupants, with regard to outlook, light and noise and disturbance.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

5. The appeal site is currently occupied by a vacant public house and an associated area of car parking. The site fronts onto Waldeck Street and is

¹ APP/E0345/W/15/3130498 dated 10 February 2016

bounded by Charndon Close to the west, an access road serving a row of garages to the east and a garage court to the south. The site is somewhat isolated from the development either side due to the adjoining access roads. This contributes to the prominence of the site which is exacerbated by the slight bend in the road and the incline from the junction with Southampton Street. Also, the site itself is slightly raised above street level.

6. The site is seen within the context of Waldeck Street, which is characterised by two storey Victorian terraced houses. The houses tend to be sited close to the highway with shallow front gardens. They have consistent architectural features which gives unity to the street scene. There is a two storey development of flats on the corner with Southampton Street, and further developments of flats extending to three and four storeys to the south of the site. The character and appearance of Waldeck Street is influenced by the terraced housing which is distinct from the more modern flat developments in the vicinity.
7. The proposal is for demolition of the public house and its replacement with a 2.5 storey building. The proposal differs from that considered in the 2016 appeal. Although I do not have the full details of that proposal before me, the appellant describes the key differences. These can be summarised as an overall reduction in scale of the building, an amended roof design and a reduction in height, a reduced number of apartments, alterations to the side elevations and the submission of an indicative landscaping plan. Also, the ground floor studios nearest to the amenity area have been re-orientated and a boundary wall has been added.
8. The building would be set back from the front of the plot and it would extend across its width. The plan of the elevation to Waldeck Street shows that the height of the building and the roof pitch would be comparable to the houses either side. The appellant considers the lower roof profile, and other alterations to the side elevations, address the previous Inspector's concerns about the prominence of the building when approached from Southampton Street.
9. I appreciate that the scale has been reduced from previous proposals and the plot coverage is not excessive when compared with other development in the vicinity. However, due to the separation between the site and development either side, the front and side elevation of the building would be seen together when approached from the east or west along Waldeck Street. The depth of the building would add to its bulk and, consequently, the development would have a significant impact in the street scene. The street elevation depicts a modest sized building, but this only shows how the development would be perceived from one aspect. Overall, the building would have a greater scale, bulk and mass than the buildings either side, and it would be a dominant feature in the street scene. Therefore, I am not satisfied that the previous Inspector's concerns have been addressed through the revised scheme.
10. I have taken into account the site's context, in particular, the three and four storey blocks of flats to the south which are visible from Charndon Close. However, these developments do not form part of the predominant street scene and I disagree that the development would appear subordinate in comparison to these buildings.
11. The Council is concerned that the lower ground level is contrived. This is clearly a mechanism to reduce the building's height. Whilst basements are not evident

elsewhere in Waldeck Street, the fenestration on the ground floor would be visible and would present an appropriate frontage to Waldeck Street.

12. To conclude on this issue I find that the scale and mass of the building would not maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the area, contrary to Policy CS7 of the Core Strategy.² It would not meet the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) insofar as it seeks to secure high quality design.

Living Conditions

13. The development includes a small amenity area located at the rear of the building. The Council is concerned that this would result in harm to future occupiers due to noise and disturbance. This issue was considered by the previous Inspector who found that the development would cause unacceptable harm to the living conditions of the prospective occupiers of the two ground floor units adjacent to the amenity space.
14. The layout has been amended in an attempt to address this concern. In particular, the apartment closest to the amenity space has been re-orientated and it no longer has a window facing the amenity space. Also, the laundry has been re-positioned so the second closet apartment would be further from the amenity space. A low brick wall has been included in the plans to discourage users of the amenity area from congregating close to apartments, and to provide noise attenuation. Although I have some doubts about the effectiveness of the low brick wall, I am mindful that a degree of noise and disturbance in an urban area might be expected. Moreover, the windows to the two apartments concerned would be further away from the main area of amenity space. Therefore, I am satisfied that the amendments would address the concerns about noise and disturbance.
15. The floor level of the development would be lower than surrounding ground levels and the Council is concerned that this would affect the outlook and light to the detriment of the living conditions of the ground floor occupiers.
16. Whilst basement rooms can often present a poor outlook for occupants, the ground floor of the development would not be significantly lower than the surrounding land levels. Moreover, the windows would be of a sufficient size and would be likely to allow a reasonable level of light into the apartments. On this basis I am satisfied that the living conditions of future occupiers would not be significantly adversely affected by the proposed land levels.
17. To conclude on this issue, I find that the development would not cause significant detrimental impact to the living conditions of future occupiers in terms of outlook, light and noise and disturbance, in accordance with Policy DM4 of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document.³ The development would meet the aims of Policy CS15 of the Core Strategy which seeks, amongst other things, to achieve a high quality design.

² Reading Borough Local Development Framework: Core Strategy, adopted January 2008 with alteration adopted 27 January 2015

³ Reading Borough Local Development Framework: Sites and Detailed Policies Document, adopted October 2012 with alteration adopted 27 January 2015

Other Matters

18. A signed and executed Unilateral Undertaking⁴ has been submitted which aims to ensure that a sustainable Travel Plan would be implemented for the development. However, as I found that the development would be unacceptable for the reasons set out above, it is not necessary for me to consider whether the Unilateral Undertaking would meet the tests of paragraph 204 of the Framework or Regulation 122(2) of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010.

Conclusion

19. I appreciate that there may be a need for this type of accommodation in the Borough and the development would be well located in relation to facilities and transport options. I also acknowledge that the development would meet the aims of the Framework insofar as it seeks to encourage the use of previously developed land. However, these benefits do not outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of the area as set out above.

20. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Debbie Moore

Inspector

⁴ Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990