
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 June 2017

by Patrick Whelan BA(Hons) Dip Arch MA MSc ARB RIBA RTPI

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

Decision date: 19 July 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/17/3172361
27-29 The Square, Spencers Wood RG7 1BS

- 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 Riseley Heritage Homes Ltd against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 163287, dated 23 November 2016, was refused by notice dated 3 February 2017.
 - The development proposed is the erection of two detached dwellings.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The appellant has submitted amended plans with the appeal. These show the mouth of the access drive widened and minor alterations to the house on plot 2. I have considered these amendments under the principles established by the Courts in *Wheatcroft*¹. I am satisfied that they do not change the nature of the scheme to such a degree that to consider it would deprive those who should have been consulted on the changes, the opportunity of such consultation. I have therefore determined the appeal with regard to the amended plans.

Main Issue

3. This is the effect of the proposed development on the character of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site lies behind a street containing pairs of Victorian or Edwardian houses, which the Council has designated as an Area of Special Character. The houses stand detached, in pairs or in a terrace. Though their front and back garden depths vary they share a similar pattern of development, with similar footprints, fronting directly to the street, in two storeys with some development in generally gable-ended roofs. They display an array of high quality detailing and craftsmanship including polychromatic brickwork, band courses, decorated window reveals and lintels, and ornate barge boards.
5. The introduction of this backland form of development would undermine the distinctive pattern of development in The Square which is characterised by houses which front directly to the street rather than to the backs of

¹ *Bernard Wheatcroft Ltd v Secretary of State for the Environment* [JPL, 1982, P37]

neighbouring houses. Moreover, the proposed houses would occupy a substantial part of the area behind the houses which is part of the spacious character of the area. They would have uncharacteristically short back gardens compared to the gardens of their southern neighbours and the undeveloped space behind Nos 27-29. The houses in The Square appear to have smaller footprints than those in this proposal. They also tend to be deeper than their frontage widths whereas the proposed houses would be wider than their depths. For these reasons the proposed development would disrupt the distinctive pattern of development in the area.

6. I have taken into account the development in The Ashes; however the houses there front towards the street with development opposite rather than towards the backs of other houses. Moreover, that consent concerned the removal of a commercial use rather than the development of a green space, and the large telephone exchange remains in the street. I accept that the gardens of the proposed houses would be similar in area to those in much of the wider area; however the long back gardens and open land behind the five houses by this corner of The Square make a significant contribution to its undeveloped and green backdrop in this section.
7. The scheme in the appeal on this site dismissed in 1999 truncated the undeveloped area from The Square by forming a terrace which divided it from the street frontage. The Council also point to significant changes in development plan policy since then which have tightened around this kind of development. I appreciate that only the house on plot 1 would feature significantly in views from The Square, however its incompatibility with the distinctive surrounding pattern of development would be conspicuous.
8. The new access drive would reuse the parking area beside the existing house; however it presently appears informal, set behind boundary and garden planting. I note that the proposal includes an area of planting in front of a bin collection point. However, the open and formal character of the access road to serve the proposed houses would conflict with the distinctive pattern of development in this part of The Square where the land beside houses is used for garden or parking rather than for access roads.
9. The appellant contends that the area was designated as special by the Council because of the fine architecture of the houses rather than its spatial or landscape characteristics. I have in any case had regard to the other policies in the development plan which require an assessment of the whole scheme including its spatial and landscape effects. I saw that The Square includes some more modern houses as well as the older stock, though they do not detract from the over-riding character, pattern of development, and high-quality townscape of the area. I also saw that many of the older houses had been extended, though these were generally sensitive to their character.
10. All these factors to which the appellant points do not mitigate the resulting, awkward relationship of the siting of the proposed houses, in spatial terms, to Nos 27-29, which would be incompatible with the pattern of development of the surrounding area which contribute to its distinctive character.
11. The Council also objects to the elevational detail of the houses considering they would be incongruous with their neighbours. The design of the house on plot 2 has been modified to be more sensitive to its Victorian or Edwardian neighbours. While I note that the proposed houses would retain the part-hips

and their contrasting plinth brickwork, an appropriate planning condition could make their appearance more compatible with the more metropolitan character of the houses around The Square.

12. I conclude that the proposed development would be at odds with the distinctive pattern of development of the area. It would be in conflict with policies CC01, CP1, and CP3 of the Core Strategy 2010 and policies TB06 and TB26 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014. These resist inappropriate development of residential gardens which would harm the area and seek development which is of appropriate layout and character to the area, and which maintains or enhances the high quality of the environment. They require in Areas of Special Character, that development retains and enhances the traditional, historical, local, and special character of the area.
13. It would also conflict with advice in the Framework which suggests that development should respond to local character² as well as the guidance in the Planning Practice Guidance³ which advises that development should seek to promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development.

Other matters

14. I have taken the views of local residents into consideration, and I have already dealt with what I regard as the main issue. I understand the concern of neighbours about the potential impact of the development from additional traffic and manoeuvring, however, there is no evidence that the roads could not safely cope with the additional traffic likely to result from the development and the turning into and out of the new access.
15. The houses would be sufficiently separated from neighbouring plots not to result in harmful overlooking. They would not reduce the outlook of neighbouring occupants, and there is no substantive evidence that the development would result in surface water flooding or loss of wildlife.
16. The appellants state that the Council is unable to provide a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites, which is contested by the Council. However, even if there were a shortfall in housing supply, which would mean that policies for the supply of housing would not be up-to-date, the development plan policies referred to by the Council relate to the quality of development rather than strictly to the supply of housing. I therefore accord significant weight to these policies, which I consider to be up-to-date.
17. In any event, the proposal does not adequately address the environmental role of sustainable development as set out in paragraph 7 of the Framework, and does not therefore constitute sustainable development. Even if the policies referred to above were considered to relate to housing supply, which I consider they do not, I find that the adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development.

Conclusion

18. In summary, whilst the development would provide a modest benefit of two houses to local housing supply in accordance with paragraph 47 of the

² National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 58

³ Planning Practice Guidance, paragraph 007, ID 26-007-20140306

Framework, this is outweighed by the harm to the character of the area and the conflict with the policies of the development plan. For the reasons given above, and taking account of all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Patrick Whelan

INSPECTOR