The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 November 2017

by J Gilbert MA (Hons) MTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 20th November 2017.

Appeal Ref: APP/H2835/W/17/3181782
40 Wollaston Road, Irchester, Wellingborough NN29 7DE.

- 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 Mrs J Rajapalan against the decision of Borough Council of Wellingborough.
- The application Ref WP/17/00308/FUL, dated 5 May 2017, was refused by notice dated 11 July 2017.
- The development proposed is two storey rear extension to create additional flat including single storey rear extension.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The Council's decision notice refers to the Earls Barton Neighbourhood Plan. The Council has confirmed that the appeal site does not lie within the area covered by this plan. The Council's decision notice also makes reference to the appeal site providing 3 flats. The existing building contains one 2 bedroom flat and the appeal proposes an additional one-bedroom unit. I have considered the appeal accordingly.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this appeal are the effects of the proposed development on:

   - the character and appearance of the surrounding area;
   - the living conditions of future occupiers, with particular regard to internal space and external amenity space, and of neighbouring occupiers at 38 Wollaston Road, with particular regard to light and outlook; and
   - the adequacy of provision for parking and the effect of any lack of provision on highway safety.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site is located on the northern side of Wollaston Road adjacent to the Irchester Recreation Ground. Given its siting adjoining open ground, the side elevation of No 40 is highly visible on the approach to the centre of

Irchester down both Wollaston Road and across the recreation ground itself. The building at No 40 is one of few detached properties within this part of Wollaston Road, which is mainly made up of terraced and semi-detached two-storey houses. The appeal site is a two-storey detached property with a retail unit at ground floor level with a 2 bedroom flat at first floor level.

5. In order to provide a further flat and an internal staircase to the first floor, the proposed development would involve the erection of a two-storey side and first floor rear extension. The side and rear extensions would have 2 pitched roofs with a central valley between them. These roofs would run at an angle from the rear of the main roof and would appear as a large outrigger. The existing building and its proposed extensions would fill the full width of the appeal site. Much of the appeal site's existing depth is already occupied by a large flat-roofed single-storey extension, which would subject to infilling along the boundary with No 38 as part of the proposed development. The proposed extensions at ground and first floor level would render the site even more cramped than the existing circumstances.

6. Given the significant visibility of No 40 for some distance on Wollaston Road and across the recreation ground, the proposed side and rear extensions would appear both bulky and incongruous from public vantage points. Despite a small set-back at the side and little visible change when viewed from the front, the side and rear views of the extended building at No 40 would be of a scale entirely unrelated to the original building and the neighbouring buildings.

7. The Council has suggested that as the proposed development would include provision of an additional one-bedroom flat, this would give rise to an over-concentration of a single type of housing which would adversely affect the character of the area. While I recognise that the three-storey converted warehouse building across the road contains flats, much of this part of Wollaston Road is made up of family houses. I do not consider that the insertion of a single one-bedroom flat would dilute the general character of the area in terms of housing mix to such an extent to prove harmful. This would therefore not contravene policy 30 (a)(ii) of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2016(NNJCS), which seeks to avoid over-concentrations of a single type of housing in an area.

8. Concluding on this main issue, and notwithstanding my findings with regard to the effect of a further flat on the housing mix and character of the area, I consider that the two-storey side and first floor rear extension and single-storey rear extension would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. This would fail to be compliant with policies 8 (d)(i) and 8 (d)(ii) of the NNJCS, which address the need to respond to local character and context.

Living Conditions

9. The existing flat on the appeal site is situated above a retail unit, currently used as a post office and corner shop. It is accessed via an external metal staircase to the side of the building. The existing flat has a kitchen, dining and living room, 2 bedrooms and one bathroom.

10. The proposed development would comprise 2 flats at first floor level. Flat 1 would comprise 2 bedrooms, a bathroom, and a kitchen and living area. Flat 2 would be made up of one bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen and living area. Both units are shown on plan A580-2a to have storage provided.

11. Policy 30 (b) of the NNJCS requires the internal floor area of new dwellings to meet the National Space Standards (known as the Nationally Described Space Standard or NDSS) as a minimum in order to provide residents with adequate space for basic furnishings, storage and activities. Part of this appeal proposal is for alterations and extensions to existing Flat 1, and therefore the NDSS is not applicable in setting out minimum unit sizes, storage or bedroom sizes in this instance. I also note that Flat 1 would benefit from increased floorspace and an internal staircase as a result of the proposed development. I have, however, assessed the proposed Flat 2 against the requirements of the NDSS.

12. In the case of a one bedroom flat for 2 people, the minimum overall floorspace requirement within the NDSS is 50m² with built-in storage of 1.5m². While the proposed Flat 2 would provide sufficient floorspace to meet the requirements of the NDSS, it would not meet the storage requirement. However, given that the floorspace of the proposed flat would exceed the minimum floorspace requirement by approximately 10m², I consider that the storage space proposed would not cause sufficient harm in itself to warrant dismissal of this appeal and that the storage space could easily be reconfigured to meet the requirements of policy 30 (b) of the NNJCS and the NDSS.

13. With regard to private external amenity space for the 2 flats, although this is raised as a concern within the Council's decision notice, the officer's report confirms that the appeal site lies directly adjacent to an existing recreation ground and a children's play area. Given the accessibility of this open space to the proposed development, I do not consider that the lack of on-site external amenity space for the 2 flats would be unacceptably harmful in this instance. Thus, the proposal would not conflict with policy 8 (e)(vi) of the NNJCS relating to the provision of suitable external amenity space.

14. Turning to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers at No 38, both main parties consider that the proposed first floor rear extension would not infringe a 45 degree line taken from the midpoint of the nearest habitable room window at No 38. I concur with this view. However, the proposed single-storey rear extension would infill an existing gap between the existing store and the fence between Nos 38 and 40. Instead of a 1.8m high fence and vegetation, the new boundary would consist of a 3m high flat–roofed single-storey rear extension. While the neighbouring property at No 38 may have a relatively wide and deep garden, the insertion of a wall some 1.2m higher than the existing fence would reduce light reaching the rear elevation of No 38 at some points in the day. Furthermore, the height of the single-storey rear extension combined with its extensive length would appear overbearing and visually dominant and would reduce the outlook of neighbouring occupiers at No 38.

15. Concluding on this main issue, while I find no harm with regard to the living conditions of future occupiers of the proposed development in respect of internal space standards and external amenity space, I conclude that the proposed single-storey rear extension would cause harm in terms of living conditions for neighbouring occupiers at No 38, with particular regard to light and outlook. Consequently, the proposed development would be contrary to policy 8 (e)(i) of the NNJCS, which seeks to ensure that the amenity of neighbouring properties is protected. The proposed development would also conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), which states that planning should seek to secure a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

Parking

16. Wollaston Road is one of the main roads running through Irchester. A gated access to the recreation ground, a bus stop and bus lay-by are situated to the west of the appeal site. On the southern side of Wollaston Road, the houses have parking bays within the grass verge, while many of the residential properties on the northern side of the road have off-road parking in front gardens. There is an area of hardstanding to the front of the ground floor retail unit on the appeal site which would provide for parking for no more than 2 cars.

17. The Framework has a core principle of making the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and advises at paragraph 39 that parking standards should take account of (amongst other things) the accessibility of development and the levels of car ownership. A revision to this paragraph in a Written Ministerial Statement[1] (WMS) highlights that any local parking standard should only be imposed where there is clear and compelling justification that it is necessary to manage the local road network. The Council has advised that the Northamptonshire Parking Standards 2016 would require 8 parking spaces to serve the existing and proposed development.

18. It appeared to me at my site visit that while the site lies within a village and there is a bus stop nearby which offers access to Rushden and Rushden Lakes and the appellant has included cycle storage provision within the appeal scheme, people using the shop parked their vehicles on the road across the gated entrance to the recreation ground or in the bus lay-by. My site visit only represents a snapshot in time, but this observation was echoed by both the Council and the Parish Council. Furthermore, the appeal site lies opposite the junction of Thrift Street and is also relatively close to a pedestrian crossing beyond the bus lay-by. The road had a consistent flow of traffic at the time of my site visit in the middle of the day. Of the 2 parking spaces on site, only one space would be usable without restricting customers' access to the retail unit, which is open from 0630 - 2200 Monday to Saturday and 0730 -2100 on Sundays.

19. While the existing retail unit would be enlarged as part of the proposed development, I do not consider that the small increase in floorspace proposed at ground floor level would necessarily increase footfall at the retail unit with a commensurate increase in demand for car parking. However, the proposed development would also include the provision of a further flat on the appeal site. Although the appellant has confirmed that the proposed residential unit is intended to appeal to single people and that car ownership amongst those living in smaller units, particularly flats, is generally lower than for the rest of the country's population based on 2011 Census data, Irchester is not a large settlement with significant numbers of jobs and services. While people may choose to use the local services along Wollaston Road and the High Street, it is likely that people will travel further afield for work and for services and facilities not available within the village. As a result, I do not consider that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the introduction of a further residential unit on the appeal site would not require further parking provision and would not cause harm to highway safety.

[1] Written Ministerial Statement from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government – 25 March 2015.

20. Concluding on this main issue, I consider that the parking provision would be inadequate to meet the needs of the proposed development, with the consequent risk to highway safety. As such, the proposed development would be contrary to policy 8 (b)(ii) which requires developments to ensure a satisfactory means of access and provision for parking, servicing and manoeuvring in accordance with adopted standards.

Other Matters

21. The Framework seeks to increase housing supply; provide a wide choice of high quality homes, including smaller homes; support the vitality and viability of retail uses; and deliver sustainable economic growth. Though development in existing built-up areas can make effective use of sustainably located sites and can assist in meeting a local housing target of 7,000 new homes over the plan period to 2031, this does not overcome my findings in relation to this appeal.

22. The appellant has made reference in their appeal statement to paragraph 14 of the Framework with regard to the granting of planning permission unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. However, as it has not been demonstrated that either the proposed development accords with the development plan or that the development plan is absent, silent or out-of-date, paragraph 14 is not triggered. No presumption in favour of sustainable development therefore applies in this case. I have considered the appeal against the relevant development plan policies in accordance with the requirements of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

23. Although the first floor flat may not currently be in use, I saw nothing which would prevent its re-use. I do not consider that the proposed development would be necessary to ensure future occupation of the existing flat.

24. I have received a copy of the signed and dated agreement under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, which confirms the financial contribution to address mitigation within the zone of influence of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area, a European designated site. Given my findings on the main issues in this appeal, I have not needed to reach a finding on this agreement.

Conclusion

25. The proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the area, the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers at No 38, and parking provision and associated highway safety. There are no other considerations which outweigh these findings or the conflict with the development plan. For the reasons given above, and having had regard to all other matters raised, the appeal should be dismissed.

J Gilbert

INSPECTOR