



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 August 2019

by Tim Crouch DipUD MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date:

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/19/3228670

347 The Meadway, Tilehurst, Reading RG30 4NU

- 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 Chaplin against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref 18/02301/FULD, dated 15 August 2018, was refused by notice dated 14 November 2018.
 - The development proposed is the erection of 8 flats (2x3 bed, 4x2 bed and 2x1 bed) which are the conversion of the two dwellings consented under 18/00297/FULD, including parking, landscaping and alterations to access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on;
 - The character and appearance of the area,
 - The living conditions of neighbouring occupiers with particular regard to overlooking, and,
 - The safety of highways users and the flow of traffic.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. Number 347 lies to the south side of The Meadway road. The Council has an adopted Quality Design Supplementary Planning Document - Area Design Focus (2006) (SPD) which identifies the key elements that define local character of this main arterial route around the town in order to ensure the existing quality of the neighbourhood is retained.
4. The SPD identifies, amongst other things, that properties on the southern side are characterised by being large, detached, set in large plots with distinctively long front gardens, with an abundance of landscaping along the road boundary and that these long landscaped gardens present a very leafy, green setting for these properties.
5. I saw this on my site visit, with the appeal site screened at the front with mature trees to one side of its access, and more open on the other, allowing an appreciation of the leafy green setting and grassed front garden. This sits

- comfortably with neighbouring properties on the southern side, which whilst a patchwork of individual design, are unified by the positioning set back from the road, with mature screening but visibility and appreciation of the large front gardens. The access drives mostly serve individual buildings, are long and linear through the landscaping, before widening to accommodate parking mostly outside the frontage of the properties, leaving significant areas of vegetated gardens which contributes to the identified character within the SPD.
6. The proposal seeks to introduce two detached buildings comprising 8 flats. These would have the proportions of the buildings in the street with 12 parking spaces to the front on an area of formal surfacing set within the site and covering much of the frontage. The two buildings would also mirror each other in design and would be served by a single access.
 7. The proposal, through the intensification of the use and mirroring design of the two buildings, with ground floor built connection, single central footpath access to the buildings and lack of boundary dividing features would make it prominent that these are linked blocks of multiple units. This would appear harmfully out of character with the detached, individual nature of dwellings within The Meadway. I recognise that these buildings have permission as individual units under a separate permission¹ however, the combination of the two as proposed would be clearly read within the streetscene and harmful to the character of the area.
 8. This impact would be exacerbated given the levels of parking provision associated with the proposal. The 12 spaces and associated turning would result in significant formal surface coverage of the front garden, harmfully out of character with the mainly grassed garden areas. It would also result in a shorter drive to those in the vicinity. I recognise that there is some variance over the quantum of surfacing in the area, however these other drives serve individual dwellings where the number of vehicles is relatively low, retaining the open character, and are often set down longer drives, reducing the prominence within the street. The number of vehicles expected within the appeal site would make the use prominent and would be increased by all 8 units sharing a single access. Whilst additional soft landscaping and bike and bin storage buildings may screen some of this, it would be apparent and incongruous in the streetscene.
 9. Therefore, the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, it would be contrary to policies CS14 and CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2012) (CS), the SPD, the Quality Design Supplementary Planning Document – Part 1 Achieving Quality Design (2006), the Quality Design Supplementary Planning Document – Part 2 Residential Development (2006) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) (the Framework).
 10. Taken together, and amongst other objectives, these require development to be of high quality and sustainable design that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area and is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.

¹ Council Planning Ref 18/00297/FULD

Living conditions

11. The proposal includes main living accommodation for first floor flats to the rear. Whilst the main windows serving living space are set in from the side elevation, the size and scale combined with the first floor height and frequent use of the room will produce an increased level of overlooking on neighbouring properties over and above what may be expected of a bedroom, the usual relationship within the street. Whilst staggered and with some boundary planting, this relationship is particularly apparent from Block B towards Number 351 The Meadway as shown on the plans. The proposed window of bedroom 2 of flat 2 would also be orientated across the rear elevation of No 351. Although this is proposed to be obscured, this orientation, use of the room and tall size of window would create a perception of overlooking within a private area close to the house.
12. The second floor rear windows serve bedrooms and are relatively narrow within the roof space. However, the floor to ceiling height and elevated position would provide views of neighbouring gardens and appear dominating over these. I note that the appellant has considered that these could be changed to roof lights, however I have assessed the plans as presented. The other roof windows within the roof form are higher positioned 'skylights' and would not produce significant overlooking, actual or perceived.
13. Therefore, the proposal would result in a harmful level of actual, and perceived, overlooking. Consequently, it would be contrary to Policy CS14 of the CS and the Framework which, taken together and amongst other objectives, requires development to make a positive contribution to the quality of life in West Berkshire and produce a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.

Highways

14. The proposal includes 12 vehicle parking spaces, with the Council's parking standards requirement of 14 and the principle that this should be provided with the curtilage. The appellant considers that the 2 additional spaces, which are required for visitor parking, could be accommodated on the adjacent highway carriageway, which does not have parking restrictions.
15. The Council considers that this will create a highway safety issue and impede the flow of traffic. This is a wide arterial road but is identified by the Council as being busy on a Sunday due to the proximity of the church, whose congregation use much of the space during events. This parking is identified as reducing flow, including for buses and restricting visibility for cars exiting driveways.
16. However, this is only for limited periods during the week and the proposal would only introduce an additional two vehicles. The road is wide and can accommodate on street parking. The road is also relatively straight with a footway and grass verge allowing visibility when exiting drives and this is an established residential area where drivers would be aware of cars pulling out from accesses. I do not consider that an additional two vehicles would materially alter the circumstances, with visitors for other properties within the street currently able to park on the road. Moreover, this is an accessible location with a bus service and ability to walk and cycle to facilities.

17. I therefore do not consider that there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety. I am also aware of paragraph 109 of the Framework which sets that development should only then be refused on highway grounds if the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe. This would also not be the case given the scale of the proposal.
18. The proposal would therefore comply with saved Policy TRANS.1 of the West Berkshire District Local Plan (2007) and Policy CS13 of the CS. Taken together, and amongst other objectives, these require development to improve travel choice and promote sustainable development and sets that the level of parking provision will depend on the availability of alternative modes.

Other matters

19. I recognise that the appellant and team have worked proactively with the Council, and that the site is located in a settlement boundary, the size of the blocks have regard to local character, have suitable garden sizes and is outside areas of flooding. However, the absence of harm is a neutral consideration rather than a benefit to the scheme and does not outweigh my findings.
20. The proposal would provide a boost to local housing supply. However, this would be a modest benefit and would not outweigh the harm I have identified. I note that the appellant makes reference of the need for the harm to 'significantly and demonstrably' outweigh the benefits. However, this is the 'tilted balance' engaged if the Council cannot demonstrate an up to date 5 year housing land supply as required by the Framework. Such a position has not been detailed by either main party and therefore I have no evidence that the tilted balance is engaged.

Conclusion

21. I consider that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. Although I have found that the proposal would not result in harm to the safety of highways users or the flow of traffic, this does not outweigh the harm I have identified. Therefore, for the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Tim Crouch

INSPECTOR