



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 October 2019

by A Blicq BSc (Hons) MA CMLI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 October 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/D/19/3236804

123 Loddon Bridge Road, Woodley RG5 4AG

- 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 H Kang against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 191006, dated 7 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 24 July 2019.
 - The development proposed is erection of boundary wall to front/side and new side access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. I have used the description given on the decision in the heading above as this better describes the development.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appellant wishes to build a boundary wall along the road frontage of 123 Loddon Bridge Road (No 123). There would be a return to a vehicular access point on Coniston Close.
5. Number 123's frontage is raised above footway level by about 600mm. The development would comprise solid brickwork to height of 1600mm along Loddon Bridge Road, with integral brick piers to a height of 2 metres.
6. There is a mature beech tree in No 123's frontage protected under a Tree Preservation Order. This is not shown on the plans. It appears to be at early maturity, has an upright and straight main stem, and a balanced canopy. It is one of the largest trees in the street scene and is prominent from some distance away. I conclude that it makes a positive and important contribution to the character and appearance of the area.
7. The ground has been excavated close to the tree to remove a former wall, which has exposed the tree's roots. However, there was no evidence that large roots had been severed and I conclude that the tree has grown with the constraint of the wall in place.

8. The appellant argues that the proposed wall would be built on the former wall's footings, and these were pointed out to me at the visit. However, the previous vehicular access to the frontage was from Loddon Bridge Road, beside the tree. Consequently, it seems unlikely that there was previously a wall along the full frontage of No 123.
9. Moreover, although I am unaware of the height and construction of the former wall, the proposed wall would be part retaining and part freestanding. My experience suggests that the width of footing that I observed would be insufficient to support a retaining/freestanding wall of the height proposed, particularly given that the wall would include piers.
10. As such, I am unable to give more than limited weight to the argument that the development could be built on the existing footings. Moreover, the absence of the tree from the plans suggests that it has not been given due consideration. Nor is there any method statement to indicate how the tree could be protected during construction. Additional excavation around the tree seems highly likely and this could damage the tree's roots with potentially adverse impacts on its future health, longevity and stability.
11. The proposed wall's scale and extent would appear overly large compared to other boundary treatments in the area and the corner plot would make it particularly prominent. It is unclear to me why the boundary wall needs to be so high as it could be stylistically similar to the dwelling without being so high. Number 125 is elevated above road level, but its boundary wall does not screen the frontage.
12. However, notwithstanding that difference in scale and height, generally I noticed that boundary treatments in the area are highly diverse. Moreover, the wall's overall impact could be softened with sympathetic planting.
13. Nonetheless, this, in combination with my concerns in respect of excavations near the tree, leads me to conclude that the development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area.
14. Accordingly, the development would be contrary to Policy CC03 of the Local Plan¹ which requires development to protect and retain existing trees, and the more general design requirements of Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy², which require development to be of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout and height, amongst other considerations. The Council has also cited the National Planning Policy Framework in its decision. This is broadly consistent with the policies referred to.

Other matters

15. The Council has referred to previous appeal decisions which raise concerns about the bulk of development on the plot. However, it seems that the boundary treatment should be assessed primarily in the context of the street scene, rather than the dwelling.
16. An interested party has raised a concern in relation to visibility at No 125. However, there is an existing fence along the common boundary which extends

¹ Wokingham Borough Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan document, adopted February 2014

² Wokingham Borough Core Strategy, adopted January 2010

to the back of the footway. It seems to me that this would obstruct visibility at least as much as the proposed wall.

17. Whether the Council should have asked for additional details in relation to the tree is not a matter for this appeal. In any case, it lends the appeal no weight.

Conclusion

18. I conclude that the development would fail to comply with relevant policies in the Local Plan and that therefore the appeal should be dismissed.

A Blicq

INSPECTOR