The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 November 2019

by Stuart Willis BA Hons MSc PGCE MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20th November 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/D/19/3236122
267 Peppard Road, Emmer Green, Reading RG4 8UB

- 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 S Potter against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
- The application Ref 190885, dated 1 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 9 August 2019.
- The development proposed is conversion of existing roof space, changing two rear hip roofs to form one gable end.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. I have taken the description of development above from the application form. While different from that given on the appeal form and decision notice, no confirmation that any change was agreed has been provided.

Main Issue

3. While the Council's decision notice did not include refusal reasons regarding biodiversity and living conditions, there are comments in relation to them in the officer report. The appellant has had the opportunity to respond to these and I have taken their comments in to consideration in my decision. Therefore, the main issues of the appeal are the effects of the proposed development on;

   - The character and appearance of the area;
   - Biodiversity; and
   - The living conditions of the occupiers of nearby properties, with particular regard to overlooking.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. There is some variation in the roofscape in the street. Nonetheless, while the existing roof at the appeal property (No 267) does not replicate that of the attached dwelling, there is an overall coherence to the shape and angle of the roofs at the pair. The proposed flat roof element would be discordant with the

sloping roofs at No 267, the neighbouring one and those in the wider area. Moreover, it would also appear disjointed and separate from the main roof.

5. Given the existing bulk of the roof at No 267 and the attached dwelling, the increase in the mass of the roof would not appear at odds with the existing context. Notwithstanding this, the proposed rear gable roof would jar with the hipped roofs at No 267 and the property adjacent. The incongruous roof design would be clear in views from the street and from within the gardens of nearby properties.

6. The new windows on the rear elevation would not align with those below. Nevertheless, there are already differences between the ground and first floor level openings in terms of their alignment and size. Furthermore, the individual panes of the proposed windows would have the same vertical emphasis as the existing openings on the rear elevation.

7. Notwithstanding this, while the development would allow an increase in habitable space without increasing the footprint of the property, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would be contrary to Policy CS7 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework: Core Strategy (Core Strategy), Policy DM9 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework: Sites and Detailed Policies Document (DPD). These, in part, seek to ensure extensions maintain and enhance the character and appearance of the house and pattern of neighbouring properties. It would also fail to accord with A Design Guide to House Extensions Supplementary Planning Guidance where it states roof design should complement the roof on the original house in terms of design and angle of pitch.

Biodiversity

8. The Planning Practice Guidance indicates that an ecological survey will be necessary in advance of a planning application if the type and location of development are such that the impact on biodiversity may be significant and existing information is lacking or inadequate.

9. The Council have highlighted the presence of large connected gardens with trees neighbouring the property, woodland to the rear, a grassland field and allotments, a local wildlife site and a Golf Club near the site. They have identified these as habitats with good suitability for use by commuting and foraging bats. There has been no compelling evidence to lead me to a different finding.

10. While the loft is already converted to living accommodation, there would be extensive alterations to the existing roof. The appellant has indicated that a survey was not requested during the application and that they would be willing to provide one. Nevertheless, in the absence of such information before me it is simply not known whether protected species are present and, if there are, whether or what mitigation measures would be appropriate. There is a further question concerning the implementation of any such measures. Given this degree of uncertainty, and the lack of any compelling evidence to suggest the scheme represents the exceptional circumstances required to justify their use, the imposition of a condition requiring a survey would not be reasonable in this case.

11. The absence of sufficient information means that I cannot rule out potentially significant harm to biodiversity. As such, the scheme would be contrary to Policy CS36 of the Core Strategy where it, in part, indicates that developments should retain, protect and incorporate features of biodiversity interest. Moreover, it would be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework where it states that if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for then planning permission should be refused.

Living Conditions

12. The new windows in the rear elevation of the appeal property would have views into the surrounding gardens. Nonetheless, some overlooking between properties is inevitable and tolerable in residential areas. Moreover, while the additional windows would be at a higher level than at present, there are already views in to the gardens of other properties from first floor windows at No 267. The orientation of the appeal property and the surrounding dwellings would result in views towards other properties being at an angle. This would reduce any direct overlooking.

13. Therefore, the proposal would not result in unacceptable harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of nearby properties with regard to overlooking. It would accord with Policy DM4 of the DPD where it seeks to prevent development that would cause significant detrimental impact on the living conditions of properties.

Conclusion

14. While I found the effect of the scheme on the living conditions of occupiers of nearby properties would be acceptable, the harm to the character and appearance of the area and to biodiversity are determinative.

15. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Stuart Willis

INSPECTOR