



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 February 2020

by Mr D.R McCreery MA BA (Hons) MRTPI

An Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 February 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/W/19/3239433

Land adjoining 2-12 Rydens Way, Woking GU22 9DW

- 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 William Lacey Group Limited against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PLAN/2018/1343, dated 12 December 2018, was refused by notice dated 7 June 2019.
 - The development proposed is the erection of an extension to 2-12 Rydens Way to contain four flats (2x1-bedroom and 2x2-bedroom) and associated access, stairwell and amenity space.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by William Lacey Group Limited against Woking Borough Council. This application will be the subject of a separate Decision.

Procedural Matter

3. In the Appeal Form the appellant confirms that the description of development stated on the original planning application form had been changed by agreement with the Council. As I consider the revised description better reflects the appeal scheme, I have used it above in the banner heading.

Main issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on highway safety in particular the provision of parking and the implications on the living conditions of occupiers of nearby residential properties.

Reasons

5. The proposed development relates to an area of grassland adjacent to a 2 storey block of apartments. Whilst the area is predominantly residential in nature, Woking College and a community centre are within the immediate vicinity of the appeal site. On street car parking close to the site is mostly unallocated and unrestricted, with the closest parking being on the roadside immediately adjacent and within a car park at the centre of Rydens Way. The proposed development would extend the existing block to provide 4 apartments.

6. The appeal site is situated in an accessible location with easy access to public transport in the form of bus routes. A number of day to day amenities are within walking distance and there is a well sign posted cycle network nearby.
7. Notwithstanding the accessible location, the Council and County Highway Authority comments, suggest that the highway network close to the appeal site appears to experience a degree of stress, with high demand for parking. The preliminary comments from the Highway Authority note that there is already significant pressure for on street parking in the area and that surrounding roads are narrow. From my own observations on site, I would not question this general description.
8. The main sources of highway stress are undefined, but likely to include a combination of the number of residential properties, other nearby uses (including Woking College and the community centre) and the general make up of the highway in an area that is made up of residential streets, rather than roads designed to carry more significant levels of traffic. While it is noted that the college and community centre provide an element of parking on site, I do not have evidence relating to their capacity.
9. The proposed development would make no off street parking provision for the 4 apartments. It is suggested that the development is designed with car free users in mind, however no mechanism is put forward which would control the car ownership of future occupants.
10. My attention is drawn to the Council's Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) from 2018 which at Table 3, sets out minimum standards to ensure that sufficient parking is provided for new developments. The proposed development would need to provide 3 off street parking spaces to comply with these standards.
11. The SPD does not form part of the Local Plan for the area. However, its purpose is to act as guidance on how Local Plan policy could be applied, notably in this case Policy CS18 of the Woking Core Strategy concerning transport and accessibility. Both the policy and guidance acknowledge that the application of the standards should be balanced against the overall sustainability objectives of the Core Strategy.
12. Evidence put forward by both main parties relating to the sustainability of the location is noted. Notwithstanding this, the SPD is clear about the circumstances where development falling below the standards could be appropriate, namely in Woking Town Centre. The document also acknowledges that the general trend towards reducing car ownership levels has influenced the setting of the parking standards in Table 3 below current levels of average car ownership. The SPD also sets out specific standards for flatted and non flatted dwellings.
13. In light of the above, I conclude that the guidance in the SPD already adequately considers the general sustainability of different parts of the Borough and includes standards that are set to reflect both the location and types of dwellings.

14. Evidence of on street parking availability is provided by the appellant in the form of a car parking accumulation survey. I find the submitted survey and related comments to be insufficient in a number of respects.
15. Firstly, the survey was carried out in 2015 prior to the completion of a nearby housing development and associated highway works that were being undertaken at the time. As such, the survey does not present an up to date picture of the effect that other development and highway changes have had on the area.
16. Secondly, the conclusions reached from the survey relate primarily to availability of overnight parking spaces. There is no firm consideration given to levels of parking stress during the daytime. As such, any contribution that visitors to nearby properties and other daytime uses (including Woking College and the community centre) make to levels of parking stress during the day is not properly assessed. As such, I give limited weight to the suggestion that highway improvements nearby have created additional capacity that will accommodate the proposed development.
17. Finally, it is noted that the conclusions of the Highway Authority are primarily in relation to safety and capacity. They do not consider wider objectives, including amenity.
18. In light of the above, the evidence of parking availability presented does not lead me to conclude that additional parking for the 4 dwellings could be accommodated on street without a consequent worsening of levels of highway stress. Without properly integrating parking provision into the area, further highway stress would in turn impact on the living conditions of occupiers of nearby residential properties, both in terms of the noise and disturbance resulting from further increases in passing and waiting vehicles. It would also lead to residents having to park further away from their homes resulting in inconvenience and having a negative effect on emissions.
19. Consequently, I find conflict with Policy CS18 of the Woking Core Strategy (2012) and supporting guidance in the Parking Standards SPD (2018) which seek to set standards for residential parking provision in the interests of achieving a sustainable transport system.

Other Matters

20. The appellant submits that the provision of affordable housing is a significant consideration in deciding this appeal. However, it is noted that no legal agreement has been provided as a mechanism to secure its provision.
21. The appellant has submitted a letter (dated 14 January 2020) from Woking Borough Council stating that the 4 dwellings created by the proposed development would be used as socially rented affordable housing. While this letter is described as an 'executive undertaking' I have no further evidence from the Council relating to its status.
22. Regardless of the status of the letter, it is acknowledged that the Council (as landowner) is likely to be in a position to ensure that the proposed development would be used as socially rented affordable housing. However, as I have no evidence that a legally binding agreement is in place I attach limited weight to the provision of affordable housing.

23. The appeal site lies within the buffer zone to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), a European designated site. In line with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 I must as competent authority ascertain that the development would not have an adverse impact on the integrity of the SPA, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, either directly or indirectly, before granting planning permission. However, in light of my finding of harm in respect of other matters, I do not need to address this matter.

Planning balance

24. The general evidence relating to need for affordable housing in the area is acknowledged. However, even with an appropriate mechanism to secure it, the overall contribution that the proposed development would make would be very small.
25. This must be weighed against the harm I have identified to highway safety from increased parking pressure and to the living conditions of nearby residents. The appellant makes partially evidenced assumptions about existing levels of highway stress such that, on the basis of the evidence before me, I am not satisfied that a departure from the approach set out in the SPD is justified in this case. .
26. In conclusion, I consider that the benefits of the scheme do not outweigh the harm I have identified.

Conclusion

27. For the above reasons the appeal is dismissed.

D.R. McCreery

INSPECTOR