



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 February 2020

by S Edwards MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/19/3241360

Silvaplane, 16 High Street, Wargrave RG10 8BY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr M Marston against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 192252, dated 22 August 2019, was refused by notice dated 17 October 2019.
 - The development proposed is erection of a replacement dwelling following demolition of the existing dwelling.
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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 or appearance of the Wargrave Conservation Area and the setting of nearby non-designated heritage assets; and
 - The landscape character of the area.

Reasons

Heritage assets

3. Located within the Wargrave Conservation Area, the appeal site comprises a detached dwelling which dates from the 1960s and is of limited architectural and historical value. The site slopes away from the High Street and is delineated to the rear by the river Thames and the Green Belt. The existing property is largely screened from the High Street, not just by reason of the topography but also the significant front boundary wall, the curved nature of the driveway and the verdant setting provided by the mature landscaping.
 4. The special interest of the Wargrave Conservation Area derives to a large extent from the variety of building styles, which reflects the historic development of the settlement over the years. The tightly packed collection of buildings fronting the High Street contrasts with the properties along the river Thames, which in many cases are more substantial and sit within more spacious grounds. This is notably the case of Wargrave Hall which is situated to the north of the appeal site. By reason of its age, form and architectural detailing, this attractive property, which is now subdivided into self-contained apartments, is rightly regarded as a non-designated heritage asset.
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5. By reason of the architectural diversity found throughout the conservation area, the neo-classical design approach is considered acceptable in principle. However, and whilst the proposed building appears to have been noticeably reduced in size compared with previous schemes¹, the overall scale and massing of the new dwelling would remain excessive in relation to the size of its plot. This would be exacerbated by the siting of the new building in a narrower part of the site, compared with the existing dwelling. The proposed dwelling would be noticeably smaller than a number of other riverside properties situated in the conservation area, but in the majority of cases, these buildings sit within proportionately larger grounds.
6. The demolition of several outbuildings would reduce the existing level of development spread across the site, but this improvement would be largely negated by the overall scale and footprint of the replacement dwelling. Despite the fact that it would be set away from its side boundaries, the proposal would unduly stand out as a cramped form of development which, in that particular context, would detract from the character of the conservation area and affect views onto this designated heritage asset, especially from the river and wider countryside. Additionally, the contrast between the neo-classical architectural approach and the introduction of contemporary features would further draw the eye to the proposal, thus compounding the identified harm.
7. Although the proposed dwelling would not be widely perceived within the High Street for the reasons detailed above, it would nevertheless be visible from neighbouring properties, but also from the river Thames and beyond. Views of the new dwelling from the river would be partially screened by the expansive foliage of the Oriental Plane, but the existing landscaping would not alone successfully mitigate the effect of the proposal.
8. I appreciate that the detailed design of the proposal has with great effort sought to reduce the visual impact of the proposal, having notably regard to the provision of the terrace and engineering works required to create a level lawn to the front of the terrace and basement windows. The submitted landscape details show that the appeal scheme would include additional planting to screen the proposed dwelling further, and the appellant would be willing to accept the imposition of a landscaping condition. However, any planting would inevitably take time to mature and could not be guaranteed to be retained in perpetuity, notably because it may not survive for many years and would restrict views over the river and the surrounding countryside.
9. Accordingly, I find that the appeal development would have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the Wargrave Conservation Area and cause less than substantial harm to the significance of this designated heritage asset. In accordance with paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), the identified harm should therefore be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. However, I have not been presented with public benefits to outweigh the identified harm.
10. Although the appeal development would remain smaller than Wargrave Hall, it would sit closer to this non-designated heritage asset than the existing building. This, combined with the scale and massing of the proposal, would erode the spacious contribution which the site presently makes to the river frontage. As a result, the development would, despite additional planting, sit

¹ Local Planning Authority references 172104 (Withdrawn 21 September 2017) and 181617 (Refused 4 July 2018).

uneasily in relation to Wargrave Hall and consequently diminish the setting and compete with views of this non-designated heritage asset. For these reasons, the proposal would therefore cause unacceptable harm to the setting of Wargrave Hall, to the detriment of its significance.

11. The proposed dwelling would also be located within relative proximity to Deep River Cottage, which lies to the south of the application site and is also considered as a non-designated heritage asset. Deep River Cottage however sits within a more secluded plot, which appears less prominent from the river, compared with Wargrave Hall. Therefore, views of this non-designated heritage asset from the river would be affected to a lesser extent. This, together with the mature landscaping along the boundary shared by the two adjacent properties, would ensure that the appeal development does not cause unacceptable harm to the setting of Deep River Cottage.
12. The appeal development would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Wargrave Conservation Area and cause harm to the setting of Wargrave Hall. Consequently, the proposal would not accord with Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy² (CS), which notably require development proposals to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment, have no detrimental impact upon important heritage features and contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings including the use of appropriate landscaping. The appeal scheme would also conflict with Policy TB24 of the Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Document³ (LP) and the Framework, which seek to preserve heritage assets, but also the principles set out within the Council's Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document⁴.

Landscape character

13. The appeal site is located on the edge of the Green Belt and the settlement of Wargrave. As defined within the Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), the appeal site also lies within the Thames River Valley Character Area. The LCA describes this area as a peaceful natural landscape with characteristic small-scale wetland features such as pollarded willows, which includes small, nucleated and linear settlements clustered along the floodplain edge, distinctive vernacular character and views to prestigious large detached properties from the river. By reason of its strong landscape character, which is in generally good condition, the LCA qualifies this area as a landscape of overall high quality. It is therefore regarded by the Council as a valued landscape for the purposes of paragraph 170 of the Framework.
14. Although it would be sited further away from the river frontage than the existing dwelling, the proposed building would be significantly larger, having regard to its overall height, scale, massing and footprint. The design approach seeks to utilise the changes in level across the site, as the proposal would notably include a substantial basement level. The three-storey scale of the proposal would be particularly apparent from the river and beyond. This, together with the creation of a large and formal terrace, would introduce an urbanised form of development, which would detract from the softer and

² Adopted January 2010.

³ Adopted February 2014.

⁴ June 2012.

verdant character of this sensitive landscape. In that regard, the development proposal is not comparable to the other buildings located within proximity to the river, which have been brought to my attention, as they have successfully integrated into their surroundings.

15. As noted above, the appellant has sought to reduce the visual impact of the development, notably by proposing additional planting. This would however result in a type of development which would rely too heavily on the use of planting to screen the development, instead of placing the emphasis on a genuine landscape-led scheme seeking to address the site's constraints and ensure that the new dwelling fits in within its surroundings. Moreover, the size and siting of the proposal would reduce the scope for the planting of further trees to compliment the Thames River LCA.
16. For these reasons, the appeal development would cause unacceptable harm to the valued landscape character of the area. It would therefore conflict with CS Policy CP1 which, amongst other things, require development proposals to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment. The proposal would also be at odds with the Council's landscape strategy for the area and thus be contrary to LP Policies CC03 and TB21, and CS Policy CP3. Additionally, it would not accord with LP Policy TB02, which seek to ensure that development proposals outside the Green Belt do not have a detrimental effect on its visual amenity and openness.

Other Matters

17. As noted above, the appeal site lies within proximity to Holly Cottage, a Grade II Listed Building. The proposed dwelling would be sited at sufficient distance from Holly Cottage, and no objection has been raised by the Council in respect of the effect of the development on this designated heritage asset. There are no reasons for me to take a different view, and I find that the proposed development would preserve the setting of this Grade II Listed Building.
18. A number of concerns have been raised by interested parties, notably in respect of the effect of the development on the living conditions of neighbouring residents. As I am dismissing the appeal on other substantive grounds, these are not matters which I need to address further here.
19. Comments have also been made regarding the removal of protected trees which, I understand, occurred prior to the submission of the planning application subject to this appeal. This consideration does not form part of the proposal before me, and any outstanding matters in that regard would therefore have to be addressed to the Council separately.
20. Whilst I sympathise with the appellant's frustration in respect of the planning application process, this is not a matter for me to consider as part of this appeal. I am required to assess the scheme on its individual merits, having regard to the development plan.

Conclusion

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

S Edwards

INSPECTOR