



---

## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 October 2019

**by S Thomas BSc (hons) MSc MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State**

**Decision date: 04 June 2020**

---

**Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/19/3234105**

**The Loft, Flat, Part Lane, Swallowfield RG7 1TB**

- 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 and Mrs Pidgeon against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
  - The application Ref 183393, dated 11 December 2018, was refused by notice dated 28 March 2019.
  - The development proposed is described as full planning application for the adaptations to existing building which contains an established lawful dwellinghouse at first floor level to provide for a three bedroom dwelling over two floors.
- 

### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Preliminary Matter and Main Issue

2. A Certificate of Lawful development (CLE/2014/1924) was issued in January 2015 for use of the first floor of the building as a self-contained dwelling. A residential use is therefore established on part of the site. Accordingly, I consider the main issue to be the effect the proposed conversion and adaptations to the building to provide a 3-bedroom dwelling would have on the character and appearance of the area.

### Reasons

3. The appeal site is located within a pleasant rural setting and located off Part Lane. The existing building is set back from the lane, served by an existing access with a large grassed area (described as a natural meadow on the plans) to both sides with open fields to the south. Given its scale it is a prominent building when viewed from the lane.
4. Part Lane is characterised by agricultural buildings, scattered dwellings and pockets of development set amongst open fields. This together with the hedgerows bordering the lane and tree cover contributes to the verdancy of this rural area. The building is a steel portal framed building comprising of painted blockwork and green profiled sheeting to the elevations, with a large sliding door to the side of the building. Whilst the upper floor of the building has a lawful residential use, I consider the building is of typical agricultural appearance given its simplicity of design, gently sloping roof and the setting of surrounding open fields giving the site a rural character.

5. Oakleigh Farm lies adjacent to the site containing a number of small buildings. Oakleigh House is located to the north east however this dwelling fronts the lane and given its residential appearance is not visually related with the appeal building which is positioned much further back from the lane. Therefore, whilst this built form is apparent when approaching the site, the setting of the appeal site and the agricultural appearance of the building gives it a different character. In addition, whilst there exists an industrial area to the south this is separated from the appeal site by open fields and is viewed in a different context.
6. The Wokingham Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2012) (SPD) states that new development in rural areas should respond to the typical forms of buildings in the locality and elevations of new buildings must be well composed, well proportioned and well detailed. Extensions may be permissible provided the scale and form does not have an unacceptable impact on the countryside. In respect of advice on residential development it states that alterations and extensions should be well designed, respond positively to the original building and contribute positively to local character.
7. The proposed storage area would retain the existing building height and would include a sliding door reminiscent of an agricultural building and would not harm character. However, the proposal would involve increasing the height of the roof of the remainder of the building by approximately 1.6m resulting in a varied height across the building. Given the scale of the building this increase in height would result in a dominant and imposing effect.
8. The most prominent elevations from the lane are the eastern and southern elevations and the introduction of new windows on the upper storey of the eastern elevation and the level of fenestration proposed on the southern elevation would result in a development that would have an urbanising effect in this rural location. The proposed increase in height and levels of fenestration would create a building of awkward appearance which is uncharacteristic of either an agricultural building or a dwelling. This would result in an incongruent feature in this rural setting. Whilst there would be increased fenestration along the western elevation, this is largely screened from view and would not result in a harmful effect to the areas rural character. Whilst I acknowledge the building is not readily visible from wider public viewpoints it is visible from the lane and surrounding fields and the proposal would cause harm in this regard.
9. I recognise the appellants' intention to improve the appearance of the building by removal of the unsightly car port. I also acknowledge that materials have been chosen to reduce their impact and to match the existing building. However, I find that the overall height increase and the level of fenestration proposed would create a bulky structure and domesticate the feel of this rural building with consequential harm to the character of the rural area. In addition, given the large open grassed area to the front of the appeal site, I consider that the intensification of residential use of this site to form a 3-bedroom dwelling could give rise to an increased level of domestic paraphernalia which would result in harm to the character of the area. Whilst I acknowledge that there exists residential paraphernalia associated with the existing dwelling; this is largely to the rear of the building which is screened from view.
10. For the reasons above, I conclude the proposal would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area. Accordingly, the proposal would conflict

with Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2010) (Core Strategy), Policy CC02 of the Wokingham Borough Development Plan Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) (Local Plan) and the SPD. Amongst other matters these policies seek that development provides attractive schemes which maintain or enhance the quality of the environment and are appropriate in mass, built form, scale, height and character to the area, should not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings and should be appropriate for conversion for the intended use. The proposal would also be in conflict with the design objectives of the Framework in seeking to ensure that proposals are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and are sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment.

11. The proposal thus would also be in conflict with Policy CC01 of the Local Plan which seeks to support proposals which accord with policies in the Development Plan. I have not found direct conflict with Policy CP9 of the Core Strategy as this relates to the scale and distribution of growth.

### **Other Matters**

12. I recognise the appellants' seek to improve the standard of their living conditions and the provision of a 3-bed dwelling would provide a larger housing unit which has some minor social benefits. Whilst I acknowledge the increase in height is in part to mitigate the risk of flooding, intensification of residential use of the site in an area of flood risk would not amount to a benefit. In economic terms I also recognise that there would be some minor benefits to the construction industry through the implementation of the proposal. Whilst I recognise that to create a 3-bed dwelling will result in improvements to the energy efficiency of the building; this and the above factors would not outweigh the harm that I find would be caused by the proposal to the character and appearance of the area.

### **Conclusion**

13. For the above reasons, the appeal is dismissed.

*S Thomas*

INSPECTOR