



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 06 October 2020

by David Murray BA (Hons) DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 October 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/19/3233002

Land east of Limeswell, High Street, Streatley, Reading, Berkshire, RG8 9JD.

- 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 Howard against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref. 18/02727/FULD, dated 8 October 2018, was refused by notice dated 18 January 2019.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a three bedroom house including studio, conservatory and garage.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. An amended plan of the proposed access and the alignment of the reinstated wall along the frontage of the site was submitted with the appeal. Having regard to the principles established in the case of *Wheatcroft*, these changes are minor in nature and do not affect the substance of the proposal or require re-consultation with the local community. Therefore, I will also have regard to this plan.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area including the Streatley Conservation Area;
 - The effect on the setting of adjoining and nearby listed buildings; and
 - The effect on highway safety.

Reasons

Background

4. The appeal site fronts a developed part of the High Street in Streatley and forms part of the garden of the appellants' property Limeswell. The site lies within the Streatley Conservation Area and there are many listed buildings nearby. The local area also forms part of the North Wessex Downs Area of

Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is proposed to erect a two storey house and form a new access to the highway.

5. The site lies in the defined settlement boundary of Streatley and the principle of the erection of a new dwelling is generally acceptable in planning policy terms subject to site specific aspects concerning the effect of the development proposed on the heritage assets of the Conservation Area; the setting of nearby listed buildings, and highway safety issues.

Character and appearance

6. The significance of the Conservation Area is set out in the Streatley Conservation Area Appraisal (SCAA) (2010) and in addition to the architectural and historic merit of many of the buildings which line the High Street, the SCAA recognises the importance of green and open spaces and the views through, even glimpses, to the River Thames and to higher land and wooded hills and the wider rural setting of the village. The Council's objection to the proposal relates more to the loss of open area and local views, and effect on the frontage flint wall, rather than the design and siting of the new dwelling proposed.
7. The land that forms the appeal site is part of the garden of Limeswell, and the SCAA describes the garden as 'long established'. However, the garden is not identified on the map in Appendix IX of the SCAA as a garden or open space considered as important to the public realm or in the contribution it makes to the Conservation Area. Nevertheless, judged on its present merits the open garden behind the frontage wall, and the gap in the street scene, does make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. However, even with the appeal site separated, Limeswell would retain most of its garden along the frontage and this would still result in a significant area of open land and visual gap to the new house. This would protect the setting of Limeswell.
8. As well as being a gap in the frontage, the part of Limeswell's garden that includes the appeal site also forms a transition between the form of the development to the east (starting with Little Falklands), where the buildings largely front the pavement edge, while the area around Limeswell is set back from the frontage. The proposed dwelling would continue this form with a set-back of about 10m behind the frontage wall. The proposed house would therefore not be prominent in views from the High Street from the south and the new house would be seen in the same garden context as Limeswell.
9. In terms of the effect of the development on views out of the High Street to other land, the map in Appendix VIII of the SCAA identifies the local key features of the setting of the Conservation Area and shows key long distance views. However, the appeal site does not comprise one of the recognised views. At the site visit it appeared to me that when viewed from the High Street the views afforded over the present space of the appeal site were relatively contained and limited to the mature trees on the land to the rear of the site rather than long distance ones. Although the proposal would restrict some of this view out, the siting and spread of the house proposed, and the gaps either side, would still allow for views through to the trees as shown on the submitted street elevation.

10. Finally, there is the effect of the revised boundary wall and entranceway. In order to provide visibility splays the proposal now includes the setting back and rebuilding of the wall and the formation of a space 6m long, and a similar width, in front of the gates so that vehicles can pull up off the highway/pavement. The existing flint and brick wall is an imposing feature which contributes positively to the character of the Conservation Area. It provides a striking sense of enclosure to the public realm. The existing wall does not lie on a straight line and visually some minor re-siting could be done to allow for visibility without causing harm. However, the combination of the setting back and the gap formed by the new entranceway, where the side walls would return at 90°, results in a substantial 'hole' in the frontage. This would be visually intrusive, and the sense of enclosure established by the present alignment and form of the wall would be lost.
11. Considered as a whole, while the development of a new house in this location would not result in a material loss of the open garden area to the side of Limeswell or curtail important views that contribute to the setting of the village and the Conservation Area, the proposed new access and vision splays would result in changes to the present front boundary wall which would materially harm its appearance. Such work would not preserve or enhance the character or the appearance of this heritage asset and would conflict with the requirements of Core Strategy Policy CS19.

Effect on listed buildings

12. In relation to the nearby listed buildings the erection of the new house does not harm the setting of Limeswell or Limeswell Cottage to the rear. The other listed buildings mentioned by the Council, (Little Shaw, Middle House, Walnut Tree Cottage) lie on the southern side of the High Street. These would not be directly affected by the proposed house itself but the setting of these heritage assets would be affected by the changes to the frontage flint wall opposite and the loss of the enclosure in the street scene as described above. This would result in 'less than substantial' harm to the significance of these heritage assets as mentioned in paragraph 196 of the Framework.

Effect on highway safety

13. The revised entrance plan shows that a visibility splay of 30m by 2m would be achieved by measuring the 'Y' distance one metre out from the kerb. The highway authority says that given the speed readings taken of the movement of traffic at the site, the 'Y' distance should be measured to the carriageway edge and so a sight line of only 25m is possible. This would be insufficient having regard to the standard set out in the national guidance in Manual for Streets. If this visibility was revised by further amending the splay to the kerb line, I am concerned that there would be a knock on effect to the alignment of the flint wall away from its present position and this would increase the visual impact of the proposal.
14. It also appeared to me at the site visit that while parking is restricted on much of the highway to the front of Limeswell by double yellow lines, in front of the appeal site there are currently no parking restrictions leading up to the designated driveway for the adjacent property Little Falklands. The proposal shows the new access to the appeal site having parking restricted but this leaves about a 5m gap where the present traffic regulations would enable a

vehicle to park. I am concerned that in practical terms such parking would greatly restrict the visibility of vehicles approaching from the west to the detriment of highway safety.

15. Local people also object to the further reduction of on-street parking opportunities caused by the formation of the new access as this would be an inconvenience for the occupiers of other properties along the High Street with no facility for off-street parking. However, if the other aspects of the scheme had been acceptable, the loss of limited on-street parking facilities would not be sufficient reason on its own to reject the proposal.
16. Overall, on this issue I conclude that the proposed access would not have sufficient visibility to ensure that its use would not endanger highway safety, contrary to Core Strategy Policy CS13 which seeks to promote safe travel.

Planning balance

17. On the main issues I have found that while the new house proposed would not result in a material loss of the open garden to the side of Limeswell, or curtail important views out that contribute to the setting of the village, the alterations to the frontage flint wall and the 'hole' to provide the new entranceway would harm the appearance of the wall in the street scene. These changes would neither preserve or enhance the character or the appearance of the heritage asset of the Conservation Area. The changes and loss of enclosure to the walled frontage would also harm the setting of listed buildings opposite. Finally, in highway terms the new access would have insufficient visibility for the nature of the traffic on the High Street and its use would not be in the interests of highway safety. The adverse effects of development results in a conflict with the relevant policies on the development plan as referred to above.
18. In the planning balance great weight has to be given to conserving the designated heritage assets. Although the proposal would result in 'less than significant harm' this has to be balanced with the public benefits of the development. The appellant refers to the continuing need for modest family accommodation in a sustainable location, however this would be a limited public benefit and it does not outweigh the objections to the proposal or the conflict with the development plan. Therefore, the appeal should not be allowed.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

David Murray

INSPECTOR