



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 September 2020

by B Davies MSc FGS CGeol

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 October 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/W/20/3256556

Land at 23 High Street, Steventon, Abingdon, OX13 6RZ

- 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 G Bertram (John Charles Property Investments) against the decision of Vale of White Horse District Council.
 - The application Ref P20/V0179/FUL, dated 16 January 2020, was refused by notice dated 8 June 2020.
 - The development proposed is demolition of the existing buildings and the erection of a single building comprising four one-bedroom apartments with parking and amenity space.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on:
 - The character and appearance of the area;
 - The character and appearance of the Steventon Conservation Area;
 - The setting of the Grade II listed building at No 19 High Street.

Reasons

Character and appearance of the area

3. The appeal site is behind the line of development along the High Street and accessed along a driveway that runs between Grade II listed No 19 and the modern building at No 23. The existing building on the appeal site is partly visible between the houses on the main road, and from the rear of the nearby Fox Inn, including from the adjacent small paddock to the south. To the north and east, the site is surrounded by open agricultural land.
4. The pattern of development along the High Street is of single-layer, frontage development with open land to the rear. At the site visit, I observed that there was limited development behind houses on this side of the road and that this typically comprised small outbuildings.
5. When viewed from the road, only the double garage doors and roof of the existing structure are visible, causing it to be read as a large outbuilding. In

addition, when viewed from the side, including from land to the rear of the Fox Inn, the domestic component of the house appears subservient, by virtue of the single-storey design and minimal fenestration.

6. The rear of the proposed building would have French doors on both storeys with associated Juliette balconies on the first floor, and the side elevations would be raised to two-storeys with several windows in each. To the front, the double garage would be removed, and numerous windows introduced. The proposed development would therefore clearly read as a large, domestic building. Given that the single-layer pattern of development makes a critical contribution to the character of this side of the road, in principle I consider noticeable domestication of this scale behind the front line of houses harmful. This is exacerbated by the proposal to build the new structure approximately 8 metres forward of the current building line, causing it to be more visible when viewed from the public domain.
7. The appellant was granted permission¹ in August 2016 to extend the building to the rear, raise the roof and convert the garages to living space. The parties dispute whether these works have commenced or not, which is not before me to determine in this case. Even if the permission has commenced, the building allowed by the 2016 permission would be smaller in volume than the current proposal and would have minimal fenestration to both the rear and sides. In addition, the current proposal is to bring the building forward of both the existing building line and that of the 2016 permission. Based on the above, I consider that the current proposal would have significantly more impact on the character and appearance of the area than the 2016 permission.
8. Core Policy 37 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031, Part 1 (December 2016)(the 'LP') states that development must respond positively to its surroundings, including being appropriate in scale. The proposal does not reflect the characteristic layout of development in the area and neither the scale nor form are in keeping with the outbuildings typically found behind the main line of development and I therefore find conflict with this policy.

Character and appearance of conservation area

9. The site is not in the Steventon Conservation Area ('CA'), but at least 75 metres distance from both the northern and southern sections. A heritage statement is not available, but a map of the CA has been provided by the appellant.
10. The northern section of the CA is large, and at its nearest point centred on a Grade II* medieval raised causeway, linked to a strongly linear pattern of perpendicular fields. The Causeway is now a residential road, the southern side of which is fronted with predominantly detached houses in large, leafy plots, several of which are listed. The appeal site cannot be seen beyond the houses from The Causeway, nor the continuation of the causeway feature on Milton Lane, and it is beyond the field systems directly associated with the CA. I therefore do not consider that the proposal would be harmful to the character, appearance or setting of this section of the CA.
11. The appeal site can potentially be seen in the distance across open fields from the eastern side of the CA along Sheepwash Lane when the leaves have fallen

¹ P16/V1295/FUL

from trees in the winter. The character of this area is more agricultural, including widely spaced timber framed barns and thatched buildings. Given that the appeal site is over 100 m distance away over several fields and would be viewed against a backdrop of other development, the proposal would not harm the setting of this section of the CA.

12. The southern section of the CA is centred on Station Yard at the other end of the High Street. The appeal site cannot be seen from this location and there is no other spatial relationship between them. The development would therefore not be harmful to this section of the CA.
13. Two appeals^{2,3} have been brought to my attention. Both relate to proposals adjacent to the CA boundary, where the relationship between the houses fronting the causeway and the long, narrow enclosures behind has been maintained. In both cases the development would have disrupted this important relationship and harm to the setting would therefore have been caused. These cases are therefore not directly applicable to the current appeal, given that there is no suggestion that the appeal site contributes to one of these distinctive layouts, and taking into account the large distance from the CA.
14. Core Policy 39 of LPP1 states that new development should conserve and, where possible, enhance designated heritage assets and their setting. I do not find that there would be any harm to Steventon Conservation Area, nor its setting. In coming to this conclusion, I have considered the duty under Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA.

Setting of the listed building at No 19 High Street

15. On the basis of the evidence before me, the significance of No 19 High Street as a listed building lies primarily in its age and architectural detailing. The list description references the timber framed structure with rendered infill and the form of the roof and fenestration, including a 3-window range at right-angles to the street. Given that the listed building can be seen from the appeal site, it is within the setting. However, there is no evidence that the site is or has been physically or functionally associated with the listed building. As such, this part of the listed building's setting makes a neutral contribution to its significance as a heritage asset.
16. The proposal would undoubtedly change the appearance of the site and therefore part of the setting of the listed building. When viewed from No 19, the proposed building would be further forward and have a more domestic appearance than the current structure, but views would be partial and at a distance of approximately 50 metres. On this basis, I do not consider that the proposal would adversely affect the setting of the listed building, its significance or the ability to appreciate it.
17. The setting of No 19 High Street would be preserved and there would be no conflict with Core Policy 39 of the LP, which requires protection of designated heritage assets. In coming to this conclusion, I have considered the duty under Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act

² APP/V3120/W/16/316087 (May 2017)

³ APP/V3120/W/18/3208949 (June 2019)

1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting.

Other matters

18. There would potentially be benefit from re-developing land, as encouraged by Paragraphs 117 and 118 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019). However, the development would contribute an additional 2 bedrooms, so the benefits from the redevelopment would be limited and are not sufficient to overcome the harm to the character and appearance of the area.
19. The appellant also draws attention to the benefits of small units of accommodation, although no justification in policy is before me to provide support for this need. The appellant also cites the lack of harm to living conditions, residential amenity, highway safety or flood risk as benefits. This lack of harm does not overcome the harm to character and appearance of the area.

Conclusions

20. Although I have not found harm from the proposal to designated heritage assets, there would be harm to the character and appearance of the area. For the reasons above, and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal should be dismissed.

B Davies

INSPECTOR