The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 December 2020

by S Leonard BA (Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 December 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/D/20/3261055
373 Reading Road, Winnersh RG41 5LT

- 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 Mrs Pamela Gurudev against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
- The application Ref 201533, dated 17 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 5 August 2020.
- The development proposed is erection of a single storey side extension with 1 no. rooflight to link the dwelling to the existing detached garage, conversion of the garage with a single storey side/rear extension and raising of the garage roof to create first floor habitable accommodation with 3 no. rooflights.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The description of development is taken from the appeal form and decision notice, since this more accurately describes the appeal scheme than the description on the application form.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:

   - The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host property and the wider surrounding area; and
   - The effect of the proposal on the living conditions of occupiers of the host property, with particular reference to outdoor private amenity space.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site occupies a prominent corner position on the junction of Reading Road and Pheasant Close, in a mainly residential area, encompassing a variety of dwelling designs and materials. The appeal property is a large detached house, of traditional design, with facing brick and rendered walls under a pitched, tiled roof. It is an attractive property, incorporating architectural features which add interest to the building, including brick quoins and gable end edging, brick cills and headers, elements of raised brick coursing, tall brick potted chimneys, and a degree of uniformity of window glazing design.

5. The upper floor and roof of the house are visually prominent in views from Reading Road and Pheasant Close, seen above the frontage fencing and landscaping. The garage and front elevation of the main building are visible from Pheasant Close, via the site vehicular access. As such, the property makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

6. There are several existing small single storey extensions to the property, and a detached pitched roof garage, which is accessed via Pheasant Close. Whilst these have resulted in a variety of roof forms, these additions are clearly distinct from each other and appear subordinate in scale and design to the main building.

7. The eaves height of the existing garage roughly aligns with the top of the ground floor brickwork of the main house and its ridge height is noticeably lower than that of the front elevation eaves. As such, and given its detached position from the main house, the garage sits comfortably and subserviently on the site in relation to the host property.

8. The appeal scheme would introduce an excessively large addition to the dwelling. Due its combined mass, height and design, it would visually compete with, and detract from, the character and appearance of the host property. The new roof in replacement for the existing garage roof would appear visually dominant due to a combination of its large volume, and its eaves and ridge heights rising above the top of the ground floor brick element and roof eaves of the main house respectively. The proposed first floor window facing Pheasant Close would serve to draw attention to the new pitched roof, due to its large size, and its shape and glazing design, which are noticeably different to those of the windows characteristic of the host property.

9. The proposed large flat roofed element of the scheme would be at odds with the prevailing pitched roofs characteristic of the host property and the wider surrounding area. It would provide a discordant link between the main house and the extended garage building, due to its flat roof and its height, which neither aligns with the top of the brick work of the main house nor the eaves of the extended garage.

10. The incongruous nature of the proposal would be compounded by its spread-out and stepped footprint, including a further single storey extension to the garage with another different roof form, in comparison to the compact rectangular footprint of the existing house. Consequently, the appeal scheme would appear as a series of ad-hoc additions to the dwelling which would relate poorly to it, and appear unduly over dominant and discordant in relation to the existing building, thereby detracting from its character and appearance.

11. The existence of a variety of building designs within the vicinity of the appeal site, and the proposed use of matching materials, do not outweigh or justify the harm I have identified to the character and appearance of the host property.

12. For the above reasons, I conclude that the proposal would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the host property and the wider surrounding area. The development would therefore be contrary to the aims of Policies CP1 and CP3 of the *Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document* (2010) (Core Strategy) and Section 4 of the *Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document* (2012) (Design Guide SPD). These policies

and guidance, amongst other things, seek to ensure that development proposals are of a high quality design, and are of an appropriate mass, layout, built form, height, and character to the area, and that extensions respond positively to the original building and contribute positively to the local character.

13. For similar reasons, the proposal would also be contrary to Policies of the *National Planning Policy Framework 2019* (the Framework) which seek to secure high quality design as set out in Chapter 12.

Living conditions

14. The layout of the appeal site is such that the main private external amenity area for the dwelling is located to the side of the building, adjacent to the boundary with no.373a, and wrapping around the western corner of the house.

15. The proposal will result in the loss of a large part of this private outdoor amenity space, together with an associated increase in dwelling size, which could potentially lead to a future increase in the number of property occupants. My attention has been drawn to the garden size requirements set out in the Design Guide SPD of 11m for rear gardens. This document has been adopted by the Council following public consultation and I therefore afford weight to it in my decision.

16. As it stands, the existing garden fails to meet the requirements of the Design Guide SPD, given the position of the existing buildings and hardstanding on the site. The appeal scheme would exacerbate this shortfall and significantly erode the amount of private outdoor garden space which would be available for the typical requirements associated with outdoor play space, sitting out, outdoor dining and drying washing, that could reasonably be expected in association with the size of dwelling that would result.

17. I have not been provided with full floor plans of the property as existing and proposed, and I have noted that the appellant states that no additional bedrooms are proposed. Notwithstanding this, the appeal scheme would result in a considerable increase in floorspace, including 3 additional large rooms, a bathroom, utility room and store. Hence, the resulting property would readily lend itself to an increase in the number of occupants, and associated requirement for more external private amenity space.

18. I have noted the location of a bus stop adjacent to the site frontage, but I am not persuaded that the replacement of garden area which is capable of being viewed by occupants of the upper deck of passing buses, with an enclosed indoor amenity area, is sufficient to outweigh the loss of a significant amount of outdoor amenity space, which is otherwise private and screened by the front boundary fencing and landscaping.

19. For the above reasons, I therefore conclude that the proposal would not provide adequate living conditions for the occupiers of the host property, having regard to outdoor private amenity space. The development would therefore be contrary to the aims of Core Strategy Policies CP1 and CP3 and Section 4 of the Design Guide SPD, which amongst other things, seek to ensure that new development proposals do not adversely affect the quality of life of residents, and that housing provides appropriately sized private garden space.

20. This is generally consistent with paragraph 127 of the Framework, which seeks to ensure that developments will function well and promote a high standard of amenity, health and well-being for existing and future users.

Other Matters

21. The Council's third reason for refusal relates to the failure to provide sufficient information with the planning application to determine the likely impact of the development upon bats, having regard to their status as European Protected Species under the Habitats Regulations. I find this reason for refusal to be appropriate, having regard to the Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment submitted with the application, which identified that the garage has a reasonable likelihood of supporting roosting bats, and that further survey work would be required to establish whether bats are present within the building. This accords with the objectives of Core Strategy Policy CP7, Paragraph 99 of *Circular 06/05: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and Their Impact Within the Planning System,* and Chapter 16 of the Framework, which seek to ensure the new development does not harm protected species.

22. The appellant's grounds of appeal include details of an Emergence Survey carried out in July 2020, which found no evidence of bats emerging from the building. Had I been minded to allow the appeal, and the circumstances therefore existed in which planning permission could be granted, it would have been necessary for me to examine this matter further and to seek the views of the Council in respect of the additional information. However, since I find the proposal to be unacceptable in respect of the aforementioned main issues, the conclusion on this issue would have no bearing on the overall outcome of this appeal. There is therefore no need for me to consider this matter any further as part of my decision.

23. Notwithstanding that the Framework encourages local planning authorities to approach decisions in a positive and creative way, this is not unqualified, and would not address, or outweigh, the aforementioned harm that I have identified in respect of the two main issues.

24. I acknowledge that no third party objections have been received. However, this does not affect my conclusions in respect of the two main issues.

Conclusion

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

S Leonard

INSPECTOR