



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 January 2021 by Scott Britnell MSc FdA MRTPI

Decision by R C Kirby BA(Hons) DIPTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/20/3256679

Workshop at land to the rear of 20 & 22 Station Road, Twyford RG10 9NT

- 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 Ray Cook against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 192280, dated 27 August 2019, was refused by notice dated 14 May 2020.
 - The development proposed is demolition of the existing workshop and construction of a new 1-bed dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by an Appeal Planning Officer whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Application for Costs

3. An application for costs was made by Mr Ray Cook against Wokingham Borough Council. That application is the subject of a separate decision.

Main Issue

4. The main issue in this appeal is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the Twyford Station Conservation Area.

Reasons for the Recommendation

5. The appeal site sits to the rear of Nos 20 and 22 Station Road and is occupied by a single storey mainly brick building used as a workshop. It fronts Brook Street and is located in the Twyford Station Conservation Area (TSCA).
6. The significance of the TSCA derives in part from its connection to the arrival of the Great Western Railway and the largely unaltered terraces of Station Road and Brook Street. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that, in the exercise, with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

7. Brook Street consists mainly of Victorian era terraced housing, constructed of a red-orange brick with slate roofs with brick chimney stacks, set behind small front gardens. Many properties have retained their original features. Overall, Brook Street has a coherent, unified and attractive appearance.
8. The appellant's heritage statement sets out that the appeal site originally comprised part of the rear gardens of Nos 20 and 22 Station Road. It contains a prominently sited, dilapidated brick workshop which has a solid brick frontage to Brook Road, the design and use of which does not reflect the quality of the architecture in the locality. Accordingly, the appeal site as existing does not make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the TSCA.
9. The proposed residential use of the appeal site is not in dispute. However, the flat roofed design of the proposed dwelling and the large amounts of glazing on the first floor would result in an overtly visually assertive building which would be significantly at odds with the modest proportions and form of the former railway worker's dwellings in the locality and the quality of architecture that they exhibit.
10. The new dwelling would appear as an alien, conspicuous addition in the street scene, which would compete visually with the existing development along Brook Street. Moreover, the proposal would appear particularly incongruous at night when the first floor rooms would be likely to be lit, resulting in a large illuminated glazed box at high level. While the use of a tinted glazing solution may reduce the glare, no details of such a solution have been provided to me. Moreover, tinted glazing in itself would be an alien feature in the streetscene and would exacerbate the proposal's incongruous appearance.
11. I acknowledge that the appellant has sought to address concerns raised by a previous Inspector who considered a new dwelling on the site¹. I also note that he has taken on board some of the comments made in this appeal decision in the design of the proposal before me. Whilst I am mindful of consistency in the planning process, it is unlikely that that Inspector had the scheme before me, before him when he made his decision, and it is not, in any case, the role of the Inspector to design the proposal. I have assessed the proposal on its merits.
12. I am mindful that the appeal site occupies a gap between the properties on Station Road and Brook Street, which due to its exposed nature is particularly sensitive to change. The proposal would be the only two storey element in this gap and would be more dominant given its design and scale than the existing modestly sized building on the site. Although that building is in a dilapidated state and the appeal site has a negative impact on the conservation area, its replacement with the appeal proposal would cause more harm to the conservation area than the existing situation.
13. In light of the above, I find that the proposal would have a significantly greater visual impact than the building it is intended to replace. It would result in an incongruous addition to the streetscene, which would not be sympathetic to the local character and history of the locality. Consequently, the proposal would neither conserve or enhance the character or appearance of the TSCA and as such there would be conflict with the statutory test.

¹ APP/X0360/W/19/3221229.

14. The harm that would be caused to the significance of the TSCA as a designated heritage asset would be localised and would be less than substantial for the purposes of paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), and as such this harm needs to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
15. I find that the provision of one dwelling in this sustainable and accessible location, which would be a self-build, along with the social, environmental and economic benefits that would be likely to arise carries moderate weight in favour of the proposal.
16. The appellant suggests that the use of the existing building as a workshop for motor maintenance purposes has the potential to cause adverse impacts on the living conditions and the quality of life of occupants of surrounding residential properties. It is also suggested that the proposal represents a long term financially viable future for the site. However, there is no evidence before me to indicate that the current use of the building has resulted in the harm described or that the proposal is the only possible solution for the site which would secure its long term financial viability. I afford these matters limited weight in my assessment of the appeal.
17. Against the benefits advanced by the appellant is the great weight that I must attach to the heritage asset's conservation. I find that the public benefits advanced in support of the proposal do not outweigh the harm that would be caused to the significance of the TSCA as a designated heritage asset. Accordingly, the proposal conflicts with the Framework in terms of its aims to sustain and enhance the significance of heritage assets and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
18. I conclude that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the TSCA, which it would fail to preserve or enhance. There would be conflict with Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document January 2010. These require, among other things, that development proposals maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment. There would also be conflict with Policy TB24 of the Wokingham Borough Development Plan Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan February 2014 which seeks to conserve and enhance designated heritage assets in the Borough. The proposal also conflicts with the Wokingham Borough Council Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document June 2012, which states, among other things, that development must respond positively to its site and local context and Section 16 of the Framework relating to the historic environment.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

19. There is no suggestion that the location of the appeal site is not suitable for a new dwelling. However, the absence of harm in this regard does not provide justification for development which would be harmful to the significance of the TSCA as a designated heritage asset.
20. I note the planning officer's support for the proposal; however, the decision of the Council was to refuse the application. This matter carries little weight in the proposal's favour.

21. I conclude that the overall adverse effects of the proposed development are not outweighed by its benefits. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and I attribute substantial weight to that conflict which is not outweighed by other considerations.

Recommendation

22. For the reasons given above, I recommend that the appeal should be dismissed.

Scott Britnell

APPEAL PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

23. I have considered all the submitted evidence and the Appeal Planning Officer's report and on that basis the appeal is dismissed.

RC Kirby

INSPECTOR