



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 15 February 2021

by Mr Andrew Smith BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26th February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/20/3263186

7 New Road, Twyford RG10 9PS

- 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 Lynne Moran against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 200472, dated 21 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 15 May 2020.
 - The development proposed is full planning application for the relocation and replacement of existing single garage; relocation of existing shed; removal of jacuzzi, brick wall and greenhouse; construction of a detached four-bedroom dwelling, formation of a parking area and driveway together with landscaping of the site, erection of acoustic fence and associated works to the rear of No.7 New Road.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. One additional plan¹ has been submitted with the appeal in the interests of seeking to address the Council's second reason for refusing planning permission, which relates to on-site parking arrangements and highway safety. Following a review by its Highway Engineer, the Council has indicated that the additional plan demonstrates acceptable parking and turning arrangements that would be sufficient to overcome its second refusal reason.
3. The additional plan is inconsistent with other plans that are before me for determination. This is, for the most part, due to an originally proposed car port no longer being intended to accommodate parked vehicles. The discrepancies between plans would likely be challenging to rectify effectively via planning condition (in the event the appeal be successful) without some uncertainty arising as to the development permitted. Even so, the additional plan demonstrates that a relatively straightforward solution to the Council's parking/highway safety concerns is readily obtainable. On this basis, I do not intend to address parking or highway safety matters under a main issue in this appeal and I am content that no party is prejudiced by me taking this approach.

Main Issue

4. The effect upon the character and appearance of the area.

¹ T.01 Proposed Vehicle Tracking

Reasons

5. The appeal site is positioned to the northern edge of Twyford and forms part of the residential garden that serves No 7 New Road (No 7). No 7 is positioned within a row of detached residential properties that address New Road's northern side (No 3 to No 17 New Road) (the row). These properties are often similarly setback relative to the highway and are typically served by rear garden areas of generous extent. New Bath Road demarks the edge of the Green Belt and runs a vegetated corridor adjacent to the site's rear boundary. The site's eastern side boundary abuts, in-part, an area of publicly accessible and well-planted open space (the open space).
6. The site's wider surroundings are predominantly residential and contain a mixture of housing types arranged in a variety of different ways. Indeed, to the southern side of New Road and not far from the site, dwellings positioned to the rear of frontage development exist. Also, Badger Drive properties to the east are set amid rows of development that front either New Road or Malvern Way. However, it is the site's immediate environs that most strongly define the character and appearance of the site's surroundings. Indeed, the row has a formal development pattern whilst a green and spacious residential character and appearance is readily identifiable immediate to the site.
7. The proposed bungalow, when experienced from publicly accessible vantage points, would not appear as an especially prominent addition. Indeed, its single-storey stature and flat-roofed design would assist in ensuring its height would be subservient when viewed in the context of No 7. It is also the case that a single garage (that is intended to be relocated) currently sits to the side/rear of No 7, such that no entirely unhindered open view through the site (from New Road) would be lost by virtue of the proposal.
8. Nevertheless, the bungalow would have a perceptible presence upon the site. This is not least due to its generous footprint. Whilst single storey, the bungalow would be visible from other properties within the row. Its height would exceed the tops of surrounding boundary treatments and it would be distinguishable from publicly accessible vantage points, including the open space. The proposed development would disrupt and erode the important contribution that undeveloped rear garden areas make to the spaciousness and green appearance of the local area. This is particularly so when noting the current absence of dwellinghouse development to the rear of the row.
9. Limited planting removals/works to trees are proposed, and I am satisfied that a predominantly green rear backdrop to the site would continue to avail post-development. However, this does not mean to say that the proposal would not cause harm to the character and appearance of the area for the reasons already set out above. Furthermore, any new planting would take time to fully establish and, most particularly due to the site's size and layout constraints, could not realistically be relied upon to provide continuous and solid buffers to the site's edges.
10. Owing to the way in which New Bath Road is aligned and the manner in which the open space abuts part of the site's eastern edge, the residential plot that contains No 7 is larger in extent when compared to any other plot containing a property that comprises a part of the row. Even so, the proposed development would fail to fully respect both the local pattern of development and the green and spacious nature of its immediate surroundings.

11. I am aware of several previous appeal decisions related to proposed residential development to the rear of No 7. The most recent of which² from 2019 relates to a proposed dwelling that would have incorporated two stories of floor space. However, given that the bungalow would be of lower height and mass, it is difficult to draw direct parallels between the 2019 scheme and the proposal that is now before me.
12. An earlier attempt to attain planning permission for a single bungalow was made and considered at appeal³ in 2008. The Inspector found that a bungalow would be well screened and that its height, scale, design and massing would not present an unduly discordant feature to the surrounding area or appear incongruous in this setting. Even so, each proposal must be considered upon its own individual merits.
13. Moreover, in 2008, any proposal for development would have been considered against a development plan that is no longer in place and in advance of the original 2012 publication of the National Planning Policy Framework. Indeed, Policy TB06 of the Wokingham Borough Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (February 2014) (the MDDLDP) now sets out specific requirements with respect to the development of private residential gardens and explicitly refers to proposals for tandem development.
14. Furthermore, the National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) (the Framework) sets out detailed advice upon achieving well-designed places and expressly excludes residential gardens in built-up areas from its definition of previously developed land. A fundamentally different policy landscape thus applied in 2008. It is also the case that the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (June 2012) (the SPD) had not been adopted at that time. The earlier Inspector's 2008 findings in a character and appearance sense are thus of limited relevance to the outcome of this appeal.
15. For the above reasons, whatever the suite of external-facing materials intended to be used, the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. The proposal conflicts with Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Adopted Core Strategy (January 2010) and with Policies CC03 and TB06 of the MDDLDP in so far as these policies require development proposals to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment and to make a positive contribution to the character of the area, including in terms of not leading to unacceptable tandem development.
16. The proposal also conflicts with the SPD in so far as this guidance states that new housing should respond to its context and contribute positively towards the underlying character and quality of the local area, and that 'backland' development will need to be located and designed to the highest standards to ensure that it does not harm the existing character of the local area and relates positively to the existing layout and urban form. Separation distances (as set out in the SPD) are of limited relevance in a character and appearance sense, as their stated purpose is to maintain privacy and to limit sense of enclosure.
17. For the avoidance of doubt, without prejudice to any other finding above, I do not find conflict with Policy TB02 of the MDDLDP. Indeed, whilst harmful in a character and appearance sense, the bungalow would not appear conspicuous

² APP/X0360/W/19/3232714

³ APP/X0360/A/08/2068300

when viewed from the Green Belt and would not be detrimental to the Green Belt's visual amenity and openness.

Other Matters

18. I have noted objections/concerns raised by interested parties with respect to matters including the local noise environment, parking and highway safety, neighbouring privacy, tree works previously carried out and the effects upon existing trees intended to be retained (including a protected Poplar positioned adjacent to the site). However, as I have found the appeal proposal to be unacceptable for other reasons, it is not necessary for me to explore these matters further here.
19. I have also noted criticisms raised by the appellant as regards the Council's handling of the planning application that is now the subject of this appeal. However, these criticisms are of little relevance to the planning merits of the scheme that is before me for determination.
20. An additional residential unit is proposed in a location with good access to surrounding facilities and services. The Framework reaffirms the Government's objectives of significantly boosting the supply of homes and making an effective use of land. Nevertheless, the provision of a single additional unit would not make a noticeable difference to the Borough-wide housing supply situation and is a benefit that attracts limited weight. There would be the potential for some nominal biodiversity benefits to arise via the delivery of new soft landscaping, to which I attach limited weight. The scheme's benefits, considered cumulatively, would be modest and would not outweigh the harm and associated policy conflicts that I have identified.
21. The proposal conflicts with the development plan when read as a whole, and material considerations do not lead me to a decision otherwise.

Conclusion

22. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Andrew Smith

INSPECTOR