



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 17 February 2021

by A Tucker BA (Hons) IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 March 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/20/3257209

13 Addington Road, Reading RG1 5PW

- 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 Tabassam Chaudhry against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 191042, dated 19 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 5 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as 'change of use to flat conversion'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. At the time of my visit work was underway at the site to carry out a different conversion proposal. I have therefore determined this appeal without taking into account the alterations underway at the site, but rather with reference to the overall characteristics of the building and the proposal set out on the appeal plans.
3. The appellant submitted a revised plan as part of the appeal submissions (Ref PL/A441/20), which shows a path that vehicles would use to manoeuvre into the parking space at the far end of the parking area. This revision provides additional information and does not constitute an amendment to the proposal. I do not consider the interests of any party to be prejudiced if I take the revised plan into account. I shall therefore determine the appeal on the basis of the plans referred to on the Council's decision notice as well as the revised plan submitted as part of the appeal.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - a) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the Alexandra Road Conservation Area,
 - b) whether the proposal would secure adequate living conditions for future occupants, with particular regard to floor space and head height,
 - c) whether the proposed parking is sufficient, and
 - d) whether the proposal would contribute to local housing need.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal site is within the Alexandra Road Conservation Area (ARCA). Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (LBCA) requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.
6. The ARCA is primarily made up of large detached and semi-detached dwellings of the late 19th century, set back from the road along wide tree-lined streets. The dwellings are rich in architectural detail and decoration, with a good survival of original features. The appeal property is a large semi-detached dwelling, prominently sited on a street corner. It faces Addington Road with a pair of three storey gables, with a lower gable fronting Alexandra Road to the side. Its well composed elevations are enriched by different coloured bricks, stone lintels, timber sash windows, prominent chimneys, decorative ridge tiles and finials. Its boundary is defined alongside Alexandra Road with a decorative brick wall, with recessed panels in a contrasting colour set under a coping of corbelled and canted bricks. Owing to its overall design, survival of historic detailing and fittings, and its prominent corner position, the building is an important contributor to the significance of the ARCA.
7. The proposal includes the replacement of the existing timber sash windows with PVCu units. The replacement of original windows with PVCu windows was identified as an increasing problem in the 2010 ARCA appraisal review. The retention of these original features is important to safeguard the character and appearance of the area. It is likely that any PVCu system would fail to satisfactorily replicate the appearance of a traditional painted timber window, taking into account its detailing, and the natural variation and weathering characteristics of timber. No details of a replacement window system have been submitted that would persuade me otherwise. Thus, this element of the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the ARCA.
8. The appellant states that replacement timber windows were agreed with the Council as part of an alternative scheme at the site for a reduced number of flats¹. However, this does not alter the fact that the replacement of the existing windows with PVCu units is a clear component of the appeal proposal before me, and I must assess the appeal on this basis.
9. The appellant suggests that the existing windows are in a poor state of repair. Whilst I could see they had suffered from a lack of maintenance over a number of years, there is nothing before me to suggest that they are all beyond repair, or that they should not be replaced in a like for like manner.
10. The application proposes additional windows on the building's principal elevation, fronting Addington Road, to serve Flat 2 and Flat 4. The new windows would sit awkwardly alongside the existing centrally placed windows of the right-hand side gable, causing significant harm to the composition of this prominent gable.
11. Although no elevation details have been provided, the proposal also includes works to the side boundary in the form of a replacement gate, new pedestrian gate and storage structures for refuse and recycling. The new pedestrian gate

¹ Ref: 200301/FUL

would cut into an unaltered section of wall, and a bin and recycling store are likely to be harmful in such a prominent position.

12. In terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) the harm to the ARCA would be less than substantial. Paragraph 196 of the Framework establishes that any harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The proposal would deliver 6 new residential units in an accessible location. This is a public benefit that attracts significant weight, particularly in a settlement where provision of new housing involves a heavy reliance on previously developed land. However, evidence before me suggests that the Council has granted planning permission for a scheme for 5 units at the appeal site². Although still a benefit, the provision of one additional small flat attracts less weight.
13. I have found that the proposal would cause harm to the ARCA. Paragraph 184 of the Framework states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource. The proposal would result in a harmful and most likely permanent alteration to the building and the area. Paragraph 193 of the Framework establishes that great weight should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset. In this context I find that the limited public benefit of providing one small additional unit of residential accommodation would not be sufficient to outweigh the degree of harm identified.
14. In summary, the proposal would fail to meet the requirements of the LBCA as it would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the ARCA. It would be contrary to Policies CC7, EN1 and EN3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 (LP), which together seek to ensure that development proposals are designed to a high quality that make a positive contribution to historic character and local distinctiveness, including the special interest, character and architecture of conservation areas.

Living conditions

15. Policy H5 of the LP establishes that the proposed residential units should comply with the nationally described space standards. Three of the proposed flats would have two bedrooms, and should therefore be a minimum of 61 square metres. All three of the two bed flats fall below this by between 3 – 5 square metres.
16. The Policy establishes that these standards should be complied with unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this would render a development unviable. No such case has been made.
17. In terms of adequate head height, section AA shown on drawing PL/A441/10 does not show the full depth of the bathroom to serve Flat 6, as proposed on drawing PL/A441/04 Rev A. If the angle of the roof slope is followed through on the section to the full size of the bathroom as shown on the floor plan it is apparent that this room would have significantly restricted head height over the bath. Similarly, the small living area would also have a restricted head height. I accept that the floor level in these rooms would be lowered, and the use of rooms with sloping ceilings does not automatically create a poor living environment; however the ceilings would be so low over significant areas of these rooms that they would create cramped internal living environments and

² Ref: 200301/FUL

be difficult to use. In combination, the deficiencies of these two rooms would fail to provide satisfactory living conditions for the future occupants of this Flat.

18. The appellant suggests that the units would be well served by windows and rooflights. However, whilst the flats on the ground and first floors would have a good level of natural light, the two small top floor flats would be served by a small number of windows and rooflights. The living room and kitchen of Flat 6 would be served by a small window and rooflight, which could not be considered a positive design attribute that could offset its other spatial deficiencies.
19. In support of the proposed accommodation the appellant refers to Policy CS15 of the Core Strategy. However, I cannot take this Policy into account as the Core Strategy was replaced by the LP.
20. In summary, the proposal would fail to secure adequate living conditions for future occupants. It would be contrary to Policies CC8 and H5 of the LP, which together seek to ensure that development proposals will not result in unacceptable living conditions for new dwellings and that units should comply with nationally described spaced standards.

Parking

21. The Council suggests that each flat should have a dedicated parking space in accordance with its Revised Parking Standards and Design Supplementary Planning Document 2011, to avoid an increase in street parking. The submitted plans show a sufficient number of spaces, however manoeuvring into spaces 1 and 2 would appear to be restricted by the existing single storey extension at the rear of the building. Drawing PL/A441/20 attempts to demonstrate that a car can be manoeuvred into space 1. However, despite their inclusion on the proposed ground floor plan, the site plan fails to show the existing masonry steps that extend out from the single storey extension towards the area of the proposed spaces. These would appear to be within the manoeuvring path. It has therefore not been adequately demonstrated that the proposal would have sufficient parking provision and that it would not lead to an increase in street parking in an area where such parking is already over-capacity.
22. The appellant refers to the Council's acceptance of the alternative scheme for 5 flats with 5 spaces. Details of this scheme are not before me so I cannot compare it with the appeal proposal. I am therefore not satisfied that this should cause me to come to a different view on this main issue.
23. In summary, the proposal does not demonstrate sufficient parking provision. This would be contrary to Policies TR3 and TR5 of the LP, which together seek to ensure that development proposals should provide an appropriate level of parking provision and will not have a detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network.

Local housing need

24. The proposal fails to make the financial contribution towards affordable housing required by Policy H3 of the LP. Supporting text to the Policy suggests that such contributions would normally be secured through a Section 106 agreement (S.106). The appellant does not dispute the requirement for the contribution but suggests that it could be secured by means of a condition rather than a S.106.

25. The Planning Practice Guidance states that no payment of money can be positively required when granting planning permission. It further advises that a negatively worded condition to prohibit development until a S.106 has been entered into requiring the necessary payment should only be used in exceptional circumstances where there is clear evidence that the delivery of the development would otherwise be at serious risk³. I have no evidence before me to suggest this to be the case. I am therefore of the view that securing a financial contribution through a condition would not appropriate.
26. In summary, the proposal would fail to contribute to local housing need by failing to adequately secure a contribution to affordable housing. This would be contrary to Policy H3 of the LP, which seeks to ensure that residential development makes appropriate contributions towards affordable housing.

Other Matters

27. The appellant suggests that a large top floor flat would not be commercially viable, however no evidence has been put forward to support this claim. I therefore give this matter little weight, and it has not caused me to reach a different conclusion on the main issues of the appeal.

Conclusion

28. For the reasons above, the appeal should be dismissed.

A Tucker

INSPECTOR

³ Paragraph: 021 Reference ID: 21a-005-20190723 and Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 21a-010-20190723