
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 April 2021

by M Chalk BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 April 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/20/3260978

17 Mount Pleasant, Reading RG1 2TF

- 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 R Gill against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 191607, dated 4 October 2019, was refused by notice dated 15 April 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as "part single part two storey rear extension. Conversion to two flats. Erection of a bike shed/storage."
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - Whether the development would provide an acceptable standard of accommodation,
 - The effect on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers,
 - Whether the development would contribute to affordable housing needs in the Borough; and
 - The effect on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Standard of accommodation

3. The appeal property is a mid-terraced house with three first-floor bedrooms and an original floor area of about 110 square metres, not counting the converted loft space. A fourth bedroom exists in the front ground floor room, but this requires use of the middle room as a sitting room, and this room receives no direct natural light. This arrangement cannot therefore be considered acceptable, and the house consequently fails to meet the minimum size specified in the Council's Residential Conversions Supplementary Planning Document (the SPD).
4. There is an extant permission for extension of the house and this proposal also includes an extension, but the minimum floor area sought by the Council is

based on the original floor area of the house, and is intended to preserve the stock of smaller family houses.

5. The proposed two bedroom flat on the upper floors of the building would provide cramped accommodation due to the small floor area of the house, with neither bedroom large enough to accommodate a double bed to provide family accommodation as sought by the SPD for residential conversions.
6. In addition, the internal arrangement of the flats would site the first floor living room over the ground floor bedroom, and the ground floor kitchen and living area beneath the first floor bedroom. This would result in ongoing disturbance to occupiers of both flats.
7. The development would therefore fail to provide an acceptable standard of accommodation and would conflict with Policies CC8 and H8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 (the LP) and the SPD. Together these require that development not cause unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties and that conversions should be of properties of at least 120 square metres gross and provide at least one unit suitable for family accommodation with a minimum of two bedrooms.

Living conditions of neighbouring occupiers

8. Both the appellant and Council have referred to an extant permission for a rear extension to the house. However, only limited details of that scheme have been provided and therefore I have assessed the proposal on its own merits.
9. Both the first floor and ground floor elements would be deeper than the existing, with the first floor rear element also increased in height. While the single-storey element would have a pitched roof with eaves lower than the existing flat roof, it would project significantly further along the shared boundary with No 19 than the existing. This increase in size would create an imposing and overbearing effect on the occupiers of the neighbouring property, especially to the rearward facing ground floor window from which the outlook would be significantly constrained.
10. The neighbouring occupiers have not objected to the development. However, I must consider that the development would result in the permanent alteration of the appeal property, with an ongoing effect on the living conditions of occupiers of No 19. Even though the rear extension may not cross the 45 degree line taken from the rear-facing window, it would result in a significantly more restricted outlook for the occupiers of No 19 than is presently the case.
11. The development would therefore have result in an unacceptable impact on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. It conflicts with Policy CC8 of the LP and the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance – a Design Guide to House Extensions 2003. Together these require, amongst other criteria, that development not cause a detrimental impact on the existing residential properties in terms of visual dominance and overbearing effects.

Affordable housing

12. No mechanism has been provided by the appellant to secure a contribution towards the Council's affordable housing requirement. There have been no exceptional circumstances suggested to justify the use of an appropriately worded condition requiring the entering into of a planning obligation or other

agreement even if planning permission were to be granted. The development therefore conflicts with Policy H3 of the LP, which requires that every residential development make appropriate contribution towards affordable housing to meet the needs of Reading.

Character and appearance

13. The proposed rear extension would be seen within the context of extensions and rear projections to neighbouring properties. The ridgeline over the first floor element would be set down from that of the main house, and this element would also be set away from the boundary with No 19. While larger and therefore more prominent than the existing first floor rear projection, within the context of the wider setting it would not appear unduly out of keeping.
14. The ground floor extension would project further to the rear than the existing, but this would have limited impact on the character of the property in the wider area.
15. The proposed rear extension would therefore not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would accord with Policies CC7 and H9 of the LP, which collectively require that extensions respect the character and appearance of the house and character and pattern of neighbouring properties.

Planning Balance

16. The development would support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes by creating one additional dwelling. Given the scale of development, this attracts modest weight.
17. However, the development would fail to provide an acceptable standard of accommodation, would be harmful to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers and would fail to contribute to the affordable housing needs in the Borough. These matters attract substantial weight, and the benefit arising from the development would not outweigh the harm in this instance.

Other Matters

18. My attention has been drawn to three properties in Mount Pleasant that have been converted to flats. However, Nos 14 and 21 are houses of different layout and size to the appeal property, and no information has been provided regarding No 53. These conversions therefore attract very limited weight in the determination of this appeal.

Conclusion

19. There are no material considerations that indicate that the appeal should be determined otherwise than in accordance with the development plan. Therefore, for the reasons set out above, the appeal fails.

M Chalk

INSPECTOR