



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 28 April 2021

by Scott Britnell MSc FdA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/20/3265882

10-12 Church Street, Theale, Reading RG7 5BT

- 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 and Mrs Earl against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref 20/01367/FUL, dated 17 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 9 October 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as the erection of 2no. two bedroom chalet bungalows with vehicle parking and landscaping. Proposal includes dropped kerb and vehicle crossover.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the erection of 2no. two bedroom chalet bungalows with vehicle parking and landscaping, including dropped kerb and vehicle crossover at land at 10-12 Church Street, Theale, Reading, RG7 5BT in accordance with the terms of application Ref 20/01367/FUL, dated 17 June 2020, and subject to the conditions set out in the attached Schedule.

Preliminary Matters

2. The address for the appeal site on the application form refers to 10 Church Street. However, from the details before me I note that the appeal site is in fact situated on land to the rear of Nos 10-12 Church Street. I have therefore utilised this in my decision so that the address of the appeal site reflects the proposal before me.
3. The Appellant has provided a Heritage Statement which was not part of the application submitted to the Council. However, the document does not seek to alter the proposals and the Council and other interested parties have had an opportunity to consider its contents and make representations as part of the appeal process. Consequently, I consider that no-one would suffer any injustice by me considering this document in my assessment of the appeal proposal.

Main Issues

4. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the Theale High Street/Blossom Hill Conservation Area and the terrace at 6-12 Church Street which is non-designated heritage asset.

Reasons

5. The appeal site is located within the settlement boundary of Theale and comprises garden land to the rear of Nos 10 and 12 Church Street. The boundary to the Theale High Street/Blossom Hill Conservation Area (CA) runs

along the front boundary of the terrace at Nos 6-12 Church Street (Nos 6-12) up to the junction of Church Street and Englefield Road. Whilst the appeal site is outside of the CA, the proposed development does nevertheless have the potential to impact on its setting.

6. The terrace at Nos 6-12 is an example of former council housing constructed in the 1920s. Although not locally listed, the Appellant indicates that it is referred to in The West Berkshire Historic Environment Record as an unlisted early 20th century terrace building by the local authority in the vernacular style of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The Council consider it to be a non-designated heritage asset.
7. The CA derives its significance in part due to the mix of attractive 18th and 19th Century houses along High Street, Crown Lane and Station Road. It contains closely spaced housing and rows of cottages with less densely spaced buildings at the east and west ends of the CA. From my site visit, I saw that there were limited views of the appeal site from the CA. Moreover, the appeal site is not a prominent feature in views along Englefield Road towards the CA. The main views I observed were of the Church Street/Englefield Road junction, the front gardens of Nos 6-12 and the former Red Lion Public House. As such, I do not consider that the appeal site is an important feature in the setting of the CA.
8. In addition, the appeal site is very much seen in the context of the existing development outside of the CA; in particular, the 20th century housing along Englefield Road immediately to the north of the site and the terrace of seven dwellings on the opposite side of the Church Street/Englefield Road junction. Within this context, I consider that the proposed dwellings would sit comfortably and relate well to their surroundings. Further, the proposed dwellings would reflect the design on the adjoining terrace, which would further help assimilate the proposal into the streetscene as a whole.
9. With the above in mind, I consider that the proposal would not appear as a prominent development in views either from or towards the CA. Rather, the proposed dwellings would appear as sympathetic additions to the area and would have no harmful effects upon its setting or its significance as a designated heritage asset.
10. Turning to the effect of the proposal on the non-designated heritage asset, the significance of Nos 6-12 is derived, in part, from its association with social housing and the welfare state. Significance is also derived from its attractive Arts and Craft Style appearance, with its symmetrical form laid out in a distinctive crescent. The terrace is prominently located on a corner plot with the space around it contributing positively to a pleasant sense of openness and informing how the building is viewed and experienced. As such, the setting of the non-designated heritage asset contributes to its significance.
11. The proposal would reduce the sense of spaciousness to the rear of the site. While I consider that this contributes to the setting of the terrace, it is, in my view, less sensitive to change than the front of the appeal site, where the distinctive crescent form of the terrace is most prominent. Moreover, there would be a sizable area of garden left to the rear of Nos 10 and 12 of the terrace and a sufficient gap between the rear of those properties and the proposed dwellings so that the proposal would not appear cramped. Further, the proposed dwellings would have a noticeably lesser scale than the terrace so that they would appear subservient to it and would not dominate it.

12. In light of the above, I consider that the proposal would result in limited harm to the significance of the non-designated heritage asset. Paragraph 197 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out that the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining applications. This includes making a balanced judgement with regard to the scale of any harm and the significance of the asset itself.
13. The Council indicate that it can demonstrate a housing land supply of 7.6 years and that its most recent Housing Delivery Test score is 107%. However, the proposal would make an efficient use of land and would make a useful contribution of two dwellings to the supply of housing. It would also be located in a sustainable location with access to local services. I consider that the limited harm that would be caused to the significance of the non-designated heritage asset would be outweighed by these benefits.
14. In addition to the above, there are several listed buildings in the vicinity of the appeal site, including Nos 1 and 4 High Street, The Crown Inn, No 4 Church Street, Nos 1-3 Church Street, the Old Rectory and Coach House and the Parish Church. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires me to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of these buildings. The Council have not identified any harm to the setting of any of these buildings. From my observations on site, I also consider that the proposal would not have any adverse impact on the setting of these listed buildings. As such, the proposal would accord with the heritage aims of the Framework in this respect.
15. For the above reasons, I conclude that proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the area, including the CA and that the limited harm to the non-designated heritage asset would be outweighed by the benefits of the proposal. The proposal therefore accords with Policies CS14 and CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Development Plan Document Adopted July 2012 (CS). In summary, these seek to ensure that developments respect and enhance the character and appearance of the area and conserve and enhance the historic and cultural assets of West Berkshire. The proposal would also be consistent with the overarching aims of the Framework including Section 16 relating to the historic environment.

Other Matters

16. I have also had regard to the comments made in the representations regarding the size of the dwellings and the quality of the living conditions they would provide, highway safety and on-site car parking provision, and the potential for the proposed dwellings to overlook the property at No 8 Church Street. However, I consider that none of the matters raised provide a compelling reason why planning permission should not be granted.

Conditions

17. The Council have provided a list of suggested conditions in the event that the appeal is allowed. Where necessary I have attached the suggested conditions and revised them accordingly for purposes of clarity and so that they comply with the relevant tests set out by the Framework.

18. Other than the standard time limit condition, it is necessary to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans for the reasons of certainty.
19. In the interests of the character and appearance of the area, conditions are necessary in relation to the external materials of the development and hard and soft landscaping (including its implementation).
20. For environmental reasons, a condition is also necessary in respect of surface water drainage.
21. In the interests of highway safety, and to ensure that the proposed development has adequate parking facilities, I shall impose a condition requiring the parking and turning areas are completed prior to the first occupation of the dwellings. I shall also impose conditions requiring an electric vehicle charging point and cycle storage, so to encourage the use of alternative modes of transport.
22. I have also attached a condition in respect of a Construction Method Statement Plan (CMSP). This is necessary to ensure that the construction works do not impact on the local highway network and the living conditions of occupants of nearby dwelling are appropriately protected.
23. The Council have requested a condition requiring the submission of an Ecological Design Strategy and I note that the appellant has no objection to such a condition. The appellant's Ecological Assessment¹ (EA) states that the existing habitats on site have a negligible ecological value and that the resulting impact would be negligible. Further, there are no specially protected species, or species of raised concern that have been identified, so that there would be no negative impact upon any such species.
24. The suggested condition requires a number of elements, including the provision of wildlife corridors, the creation, restoration and enhancement of semi-natural habitats and other biodiversity measures such as bat boxes, bee bricks and bird boxes. Given the findings of the Appellant's EA and the minor scale of proposed development, I do not consider that such a condition is reasonable in this case.
25. However, I am conscious that Policy CS17 of the CS seeks to conserve and enhance the environmental capacity of the District and that all developments should maximise opportunities to achieve net gains in biodiversity. In this case, I consider that some form of biodiversity measures (such as the examples of bat boxes, bee bricks, bird boxes) would be achievable in this development and, as such, a condition requiring some biodiversity measures would be appropriate in the context of Policy CS17.
26. With the exception of the conditions relating to the CSMP, and drainage matters, it is not necessary for any of these to be pre-commencement conditions. It is however necessary for these matters to be agreed prior to any works commencing as they involve matters which relate to the period of construction works or could affect the initial site works.

¹ Derek Finnie Associates Consultant Ecologists September 2020.

Conclusion

27. For the above reasons, having considered the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework, and all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

Scott Britnell

INSPECTOR

SCHEDULE OF CONDITIONS

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans listed below:

625-02-00 Revision P3, 625-02-02 Revision P3, 625-03-00 Revision P1, 625-03-01 Revision P1, 625-02-10 Revision P1, 625-04-01 Revision P1
3. No development shall take place until a Construction Method Statement has been submitted to, and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The statement shall provide for:
 - a. The parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors
 - b. Loading and unloading of plant and materials
 - c. Storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development
 - d. The erection and maintenance of security hoarding including any decorative displays and facilities for public viewing
 - e. Wheel washing facilities
 - f. Measures to control the emission of dust and dirt during construction
 - g. A scheme for recycling/disposing of waste resulting from demolition and construction works
 - h. A site set-up plan during the works

The approved Construction Method Statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period for the development.
4. No development shall take place until a scheme of surface water drainage has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall incorporate sustainable drainage principles to deal with surface water run-off within the application site. The dwellings shall not be occupied until the scheme of surface water drainage has been implemented in accordance with the approved details. The approved method of surface water drainage shall be retained thereafter.
5. No development above slab level shall take place until details of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the dwellings and hard surfaced areas hereby has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Thereafter the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved materials.
6. No dwelling shall be occupied until a detailed soft landscaping scheme has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The soft landscaping scheme shall include detailed plans, planting and

retention schedule, programme of works, and any other supporting information. All soft landscaping works shall be completed in accordance with the approved soft landscaping scheme within the first planting season following completion of building operations / first occupation of the new dwelling (whichever occurs first). Any trees, shrubs, plants or hedges planted in accordance with the approved scheme which are removed, die, or become diseased or become seriously damaged within five years of completion of this completion of the approved soft landscaping scheme shall be replaced within the next planting season by trees, shrubs or hedges of a similar size and species to that originally approved.

7. No dwelling shall be occupied until the hard landscaping of its plot has been completed in accordance with the hard landscaping scheme shown on proposed site plan drawing 625-02-10 Revision P1 and as approved by the details agreed in condition 5.
8. No dwelling shall be occupied until vehicle parking and turning spaces for that dwelling have been completed in accordance with the approved plans (including any surfacing arrangements and marking out). Thereafter the parking and turning spaces shall be kept available for parking and manoeuvring (of private cars and/or private light goods vehicles) at all times.
9. No dwelling shall be occupied until an electric vehicle charging point has been provided for that dwelling in accordance with details that have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Thereafter, the charging point shall be maintained, and kept available and operational for electric vehicles at all times.
10. No dwelling shall be occupied until cycle parking and storage space has been provided in accordance with details that have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Thereafter, the cycle parking and storage space shall be retained for this purpose at all times.
11. No development above slab level shall take place until a scheme of biodiversity enhancements (which may include bat boxes, bee bricks and bird boxes) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The approved details shall be incorporated into the development prior to the first occupation of the dwellings and shall be retained as such at all times.