



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 7 December 2021

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 December 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/21/3276431

50 Benning Way, Wokingham RG40 1XX

- 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 Miss Shaan Sood against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 210506, dated 1 March 2021, was refused by notice dated 14 May 2021.
 - The development proposed is described as 'change of land use of amenity land to residential, the proposed demolition of existing garden wall and the proposed erection of a part single/part two storey side extension to create habitable accommodation with the insertion of 3 rooflights plus changes to fenestration.'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site includes a semi-detached dwelling at the corner of Benning Way and Shefford Crescent. These streets are part of a contemporaneous development characterised by a mix of terraced and mostly semi-detached and detached dwellings which are typically arranged on consistent building lines set back from the streets. For the most part, buildings are set fairly close together. Nevertheless, they have relatively generous open frontages, and together with areas of soft landscaping that I saw were usually present to the sides of buildings, this provides for an overall impression of spaciousness in views along the street scenes. Together with the mostly similar architectural designs and external materials of the buildings themselves, this pattern provides for an overall sense of rhythm, and there is a coherence to the character and appearance of the area which is distinctive.
4. Beyond a wall enclosing part of the rear garden to the appeal dwelling that wraps around to its side, the space between the dwelling and the footway to Shefford Crescent comprises an area of gravel which extends the full depth of the plot. The appellant disagrees with the Council's description of the gravelled area as 'amenity land', but it is in any case open, and irrespective of the existing gravel surfacing, it adds to the spaciousness around this corner in keeping with the layout of the surrounding development.

5. The proposed extension would infill much of the space between the dwelling and the boundary with Shefford Crescent at two-storey level. The close proximity of the development to the footway would be at odds with the more generous spacing which is typical to the side of buildings on corner plots nearby, and would result in a significant reduction in openness on the site. In addition, the remaining open space alongside Shefford Crescent would be enclosed by a fence which is proposed along the boundary of the site. This would further stand out against the areas of soft landscaping that are commonly present to the side of buildings on corners, and would further erode spaciousness on the appeal site resulting in an unusual degree of enclosure to the street.
6. Although of differing orientation, the development would be seen together with dwellings on Shefford Crescent to the rear of the site in views towards Benning Way. The extension would broadly continue the alignment of the building line along this part of Shefford Crescent where dwellings step forward towards the Benning Way junction. Nevertheless, the Shefford Crescent dwellings maintain similar set back distances from the street edge providing for relatively generous frontages. Against this arrangement, the lack of spaciousness to the side of the appeal site would be conspicuous, and the extension and fence would be prominent and jarring features in the Shefford Crescent street scene.
7. Materials to other properties nearby are predominantly brick, with sections of cladding generally restricted to first-floor level. The suggested use of cladding to all elevations of the extension would be incongruous, and would exacerbate the visual impact of the development. However, I am satisfied that it would in this case be possible to secure a more sympathetic external finish by way of a planning condition as has been suggested by the appellant. Nevertheless, this would not overcome the uncharacteristic proximity of the development to the adjacent footway, and I find for the reasons above that the development would be a discordant and intrusive feature that would erode the spacious quality and distinctive pattern of its surroundings.
8. In reaching this view, I note instances of buildings extending onto landscaped areas at corners in the vicinity of the site, and I have considered example developments drawn to my attention by the appellant. However, there is significant separation between the extension to 7 Benning Way and the boundary at the side of the site. At 38 Benning Way, the two-storey extension is adjacent to a neighbouring dwelling rather than the highway, and while there is development to its other side close to Shefford Crescent, I saw that this is single-storey and partly screened to the street by a strip of vegetation along the boundary. Finally, the extension at 40 Benning Way is set further from the adjacent footway on Leney Close than would be the case on the appeal site, and soft landscaping is provided alongside the extension which helps to soften the visual impact of development in the street scene. I therefore disagree with the appellant that the visual impact of these developments is similar to the appeal scheme, and I do not find that they offer compelling support for the proposal which I have in any event considered on its own merits.
9. For these reasons, I conclude that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area contrary to Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy 2010 which requires, amongst other things, that proposals are of appropriate mass, layout, built form, materials and character to the area. It would also be contrary to the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning

Document 2012 which includes guidance that alterations and extensions should respond positively to context, maintaining or enhancing the street scene and local character. In addition, the proposal would conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework which broadly seeks well-designed places and which includes requirements for development that is sympathetic to local character.

10. The Council has confirmed that additional reference to Policy TB06 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 in the reason for refusal was an error, and I have considered the appeal on that basis.

Other Matters

11. Based on my observations at my visit and the evidence before me, I am satisfied that the development would not adversely affect visibility around the junction of Benning Way and Shefford Crescent, or otherwise harm highway safety. While I have taken into account the representations of an interested party and the Town Council, these do not alter my findings on the main issue.

Conclusion

12. The proposal would make effective use of the site to create additional living space and improve the quality of living accommodation for the appellant, but I do not consider that this benefit is sufficient to outweigh the harm that would be caused to the character and appearance of the area and the resulting conflict with the development plan when it is read as a whole.
13. Material considerations do not indicate that the application should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan, and I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR