



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 December 2021

by Helen Davies MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13th January 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/D/21/3283068

225 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham RG40 3HS

- 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 Paul and Lizzy Billingham against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 211473, dated 27 April 2021, was refused by notice dated 20 July 2021.
 - The development proposed is described as 'ground floor extensions to existing dwelling, conversion of garage to residential accommodation, alterations to the appearance of front elevation, erection of a garage in the front garden and associated landscaping'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposed development includes extensions and alterations to the dwelling. However, the reasons for refusal relate only to the impact of the proposed garage, so this forms the focus of the appeal.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed garage on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area, with particular reference to the green route and protected trees.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located on a section of the A321 Finchampstead Road, which is characterised by large, detached dwellings set well back from the road. Most dwellings have trees and hedges forming the boundary with the road. There is an extended stretch of road frontage on the other side of the road and just north of the site which does not contain any buildings. The combination of these factors means that the streetscene in this area is dominated by mature vegetation rather than built form. In recognition of the tree and hedge lined character of Finchampstead Road, it is designated as a green route.
5. The detached dwelling at the appeal site is a similar scale to other dwellings in the area. It is set back from the road by around 20 metres, in common with surrounding dwellings. There are mature trees in the front garden of the site and 223 Finchampstead Road which are covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). These trees are not all adjacent to the road, but still form an important part of the streetscene, and enhance the setting of the dwelling.

6. Wokingham Borough Council Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2012 (DG) specifies that garages should not be sited in the front garden and should not project forward of the building line of the property. Whilst the proposal clearly does not meet this requirement, it is still necessary to assess the garage in the context of the specific site and consider if it would result in harm to the character of the area.
7. The garage would be sited in front of the dwelling, close to the road. The blank rear elevation of the garage would occupy almost half the width of the site frontage, with the use of a hipped roof only reducing the bulk to a modest extent. The scale and location of the garage would make it a highly prominent and uncharacteristic element within the streetscene. The garage would also dominate any views of the dwelling, fundamentally altering the relationship between the dwelling and the road.
8. The front boundary of the site, and the boundaries with the driveway, are formed by a post and rail fence, with laurel hedging behind it. Despite the stated intention to grow the hedge to a height of 5 metres, at the time of my site visit the hedge was no more than 2.5 meters high and fairly immature with gaps between individual plants. Whilst the hedge would become taller and denser over time, and its retention could be secured by condition, the hedge would take a number of years to grow to a size that would provide adequate screening for the garage. Due to the location of the trees on site, and the height of the canopy, they would do little to screen the garage from the road.
9. Due to the above factors, the proposal would add a highly visible and bulky built form to a streetscene characterised by vegetation. Consequently, the garage would be a dominant and incongruous feature which would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the site, the area, and the green route.
10. My attention has been drawn to examples of other garages forward of a dwelling, in particular at 312 Finchampstead Road, which was granted planning permission in 2013. I do not have full details of the examples before me, but I viewed those identified during my site visit. Some were smaller and differently orientated than the proposal, others were set further back from the road, and all were well screened by mature trees and hedging. From the officer report for the application at No 312, I can see that the scale of the approved garage was smaller, existing mature planting to the front of the site was retained, and no protected trees were impacted upon. It was apparent during my site visit that these other garages do not result in highly visible built form intruding into the landscaped streetscene which is characteristic of the area. Therefore, whilst other garages in the area are an important consideration, the setting, scale and impact is different, so I cannot draw any direct comparison with the proposal before me. In any event, each case must be considered on its own merits and impacts and direct parallels are not easily drawn.
11. As already noted, trees in the front garden of the site are covered by a TPO, which recognises their value to the amenity of the area. These trees are highly visible and prominent elements of the streetscene, so the loss of any would be significantly detrimental to the character and appearance of the area. An Arboricultural Impact Assessment And Method Statement has been provided by the appellants, along with an Arboricultural Appeal Statement. These indicate

that two protected lime trees near the front of the site, referenced T1 and T2, are mature and have a life expectancy of 10 plus years.

12. The proposal does not intend to remove trees T1 or T2, but the garage would be located almost entirely within the root protection area of these trees and the side elevation would be very close to the trunk of both. A series of technical construction approaches have been set out, designed to minimise the impact of the garage on the trees, during and after development, with the aim of ensuring their long-term vitality.
13. The proposed technical solutions would likely mitigate many of the impacts of the garage on trees T1 and T2 and compliance with the method statement could be secured by condition. However, due to the proposed location and scale of the garage, it seems unlikely that the development would have no impact on the viability of the protected trees in the long term. At the very least, the close proximity of the trees would inevitably have maintenance implications for the garage, leading to the potential for future pressure to significantly reduce or even remove the trees. Any reduction to or loss of trees T1 and T2 would have a detrimental impact on the streetscene by reducing the vegetation within the front garden. Should this happen, it would add to the unacceptable harm which has already been identified above, further damaging the character and appearance of the site, the area and the green route.
14. I conclude that the proposed development would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area, with particular reference to the green route and protected trees. Consequently, the development would not comply with Policy CC03 of the Wokingham Borough Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014, and Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2010, and the DG. Together, amongst other things, these seek to ensure that development maintains or enhances the quality of the environment; is of a scale and layout which contributes positively to the character of the area; mitigates any impact on green infrastructure, including green routes; and protects existing trees.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons given above and taking into account the development plan as a whole and all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Helen Davies

INSPECTOR