



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 January 2022

by Oliver Marigold BSc DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/21/3284791

34, 36, 36a Mill Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG4 8DP

- 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 E Jennings against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 210206, dated 9 February 2021, was refused by notice dated 27 May 2021.
 - The development proposed is a single storey front and two storey side and rear extension at 34 Mill Road. Second storey rear extension at 36 Mill Road. Single storey front and rear and two storey side extension at 36A Mill Road.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed

Main Issues

2. The main issues in this appeal are the effect of the proposal on:
 - The character and appearance of the area
 - Highway safety, and
 - The living conditions of neighbouring properties

Reasons

Character and appearance of the area

3. The area is primarily residential but somewhat varied in character. Many of the dwellings locally, including in Mill Road, Queen's Road and one side of Piggott's Road are two storey brick terraces, described as Victorian in age, and having pitched gable roofs.
4. Houses immediately around the appeal site, in Mill Road, Mill Green and the nearest side of Piggott's Road, are predominantly lower density semi-detached dwellings with pitched hipped roofs. These dwellings form something of a modern enclave amongst the older terraces, though there are also more recent dwellings in the area, including at Heron Island and Monkley Court, with both gabled and hipped roof forms.
5. The appeal site consists of what was originally a semi-detached pair (34 and 36 Mill Road), onto which was added number 36A, making a terrace of three. The building's overall pitched, hipped roof form is broadly symmetrical.

6. The proposals would extend the terrace either side with dual-pitched gable roofs. The extensions would be set back from the frontage and have a lower ridge than the existing roof, with the roof plane being set back from the current plane. These factors mean that they would be symmetrical and subservient to the existing terrace. To this extent they would comply with the Design Guide to House Extensions Supplementary Planning Document ('the Design SPD').
7. As I have described above, the character of the area is varied in terms of roof forms. Many are gabled, including 145 Queen's Road opposite and 28 Mill Road very close by. These are however end of terrace properties. In contrast, the appeal building clearly reads as part of the hipped-roofed cluster of properties.
8. I accept that, as part of this cluster, 4 Mill Green also has a gable rather than a hip, as does 11 Piggott's Road. They form part of the area's character even though they may have been achieved under permitted development rights.
9. Nevertheless, the properties at 30-32 Mill Road and 2 Mill Green, either side of the appeal property, both have hipped roofs. While the proposal has been designed to make the original hip discernible, the gabled vertical roof proposed to number 34 and 36A would conflict with the hipped form of their neighbours. Rather than framing 30-32 Mill Road, they would appear out of place and have a visually jarring effect on the street scene.
10. Furthermore, while I consider that the tapered side extension to 36A would reflect the site's boundaries, and so would not appear contrived, I am also concerned that the width of both roof extensions either side of the building would result in the roof form having a large, excessive mass, resulting in a bulky appearance. This would be uncharacteristic of dwellings nearby and I note that the Design SPD cautions at paragraph 7.2.4 that gables may create too much mass in some cases.
11. I appreciate the benefits of the proposal which include a more efficient use of land and improvements to the forecourt's appearance. I recognise too that the appellants have sought to overcome an earlier scheme's refusal reasons. However, outweighing this is the overdeveloped appearance caused by the increase in cars parked within the forecourt, which in my view adds to the detrimental effect of the proposal on the street scene.
12. After submission of the appeal, the Council has permitted a certificate of lawfulness¹ at number 34 for a single storey rear extension and loft conversion with rear dormer. Planning permission has also been granted² for a single storey rear and side extension at the same address, details of which have been provided to me. However, these potential alternative proposals are single storey and relate just to number 34. Given their smaller size and mass they would not have the same adverse impact as the appeal proposal, and they do not change my conclusions on this issue.
13. I therefore conclude that the area's character and appearance would be harmed by the proposal, contrary to policies CC7 and H9 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (November 2019) and their requirement that development must have a high-quality design and reinforce local distinctiveness. For similar reasons it would also conflict with the Design SPD (March 2021).

¹ Reference 211814/CLP, permitted 23 December 2021

² Reference 211956/HOU, granted 8 February 2022

Highway Safety

14. The site is located within an area where on-street parking is restricted to permit holders only, including spaces directly opposite the appeal site. When I visited there were a few spaces available, but this only represents a snapshot in time. Given the need for parking restrictions locally, I agree with both parties that the area has a high volume of on-street parking.
15. Hardstanding already exists across much of the appeal site's forecourt. I saw from my visit, and from the historic evidence before me, that some in-depth parking already takes place here, though can only occur in some cases by vehicles driving over the raised pavement.
16. The proposals seek to formalise the parking arrangements and provide seven spaces on the forecourt, perpendicular to the street. The creation of designated parking spaces would compensate for the parking areas that would be lost by the development and I note that the garage to number 34 could be lost in any case under permission 211956/HOU.
17. However, use of the forecourt as proposed would seem to be more intensely provided for than has previously taken place. The designation of formal spaces, together with the additional front landscaping areas proposed, would leave little space for vehicles turning into or leaving other spaces, potentially requiring a greater level of manoeuvring on the footway or conflicting with the vehicles parked on the road, compared to the current situation.
18. No tracking information has been provided, and the appellants do not dispute that there would be insufficient depth for vehicles to enter or leave the spaces without manoeuvring on the highway or footway. Therefore, based on the information before me, I consider that there is a very real possibility of conflict between vehicles entering or leaving the site and other road users.
19. The appellant argues that the parking areas proposed could be created under permitted development rights. Even so, the Borough Council has control over the creation of dropped kerbs under other legislation. Whether the Borough Council chooses to allow dropped kerbing for longer than the 10 metres normally permitted, as would be necessary here, is for it to determine. Nevertheless, the Council's ability to potentially prevent the creation of lawful access to the spaces means that I can give this fallback only limited weight.
20. Having regard to the Revised Parking Standards and Design Supplementary Planning Document (October 2011), I conclude that the proposal would harm highway safety, failing to comply with Policy TR3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, which requires that proposals must not have a materially detrimental effect on the functioning of the transport network. It would similarly conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework's requirement for safe and suitable access for all users.

Living conditions

21. The second refusal reason refers to the impact on the outlook of neighbouring dwellings. Although only numbers 2 Mill Green and 32 Mill Road were referred to in the reason for refusal, the Council has subsequently confirmed that its concerns also relate to 4 Mill Green. Both parties have commented on this matter, and I have considered the effect on all these properties.

22. In order to safeguard living conditions, adopted Local Plan policy CC8 and the Design SPD states that a back-to-back separation distance of 20 metres between dwellings is usually appropriate. The existing distance from 2-4 Mill Lane, albeit side-to-back, is currently less than 20 metres and it is important that sufficient outlook is retained to these properties.
23. The extension to 36A would bring the dwelling closer to number 2 and 4's rear elevation, being around 15 metres away. Both properties already look onto the existing dwelling and its blank side elevation however, and number 2's outlook is also affected by its large outbuilding on the boundary with the appeal site. The distance to 36A's proposed flank elevation would still be relatively large, enough to ensure that adequate outlook to numbers 2-4 would remain.
24. On the other side of the terrace, a two-storey side extension to number 34 would replace the garage and bring the house closer to number 32's side boundary, as well as extending to the rear. The extension would have limited offset from the boundary, though number 32 itself is separated from it by its garage. Furthermore, from number 32's rear windows the views towards the extension would be at an oblique angle, along the garden, meaning that the impact on outlook would be limited.
25. The rear two-storey extension element would have a lower roof form than the main part of the dwelling and with less mass and therefore less impact on number 32. The Design SPD permits rear extensions of 4 metres in length in circumstances which the proposal would comply with. For these reasons, I am satisfied that the proposed extension would not harm the outlook or have an overbearing effect to number 32 or its garden.
26. Local residents have raised concerns about the effect of the extensions on other properties, including at Piggott's Road and Queen's Road, in respect of light and overlooking. While the proposed extensions would be visible from these properties, the back-to-back distance between the extension and dwellings in Piggott's Road complies with the Design SPD's requirements and is acceptable in terms of light and privacy. Similarly, I am satisfied that the distance to 145 Queen's Road is sufficient to ensure adequate light to that property. I note that the Council reached a similar view.
27. I therefore conclude that the proposal would not harm the living conditions of neighbouring properties and would therefore comply with policies CC8 and H9 of the adopted Reading Borough Local Plan, as well as the Design SPD in this respect.

Conclusion

28. I have found that the proposal would not harm the living conditions of neighbouring properties. However, because of the harm to the character and appearance of the area, and to highway safety, I consider that the balance of considerations is against the appeal proposals.
29. Having regard to the Development Plan and all other material considerations, for the reasons given above, I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Oliver Marigold INSPECTOR