

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 May 2022

by Jonathan Manning BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 May 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/D/22/3292459

The Red House, Reading Road, Lower Basildon, Reading, RG8 9NG

- 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 Andrew Field against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 21/02597/HOUSE, dated 13 October 2021, was refused by notice dated 15 December 2021.
 - The development proposed is creation of a new access and egress on to the A329 to serve a parking space with electric vehicle charging point.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue of the appeal is the effect of the proposal on highway safety.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located on the A329 Reading Road and lies opposite the junction with Church Lane. The proposal seeks to secure the provision of a new access and egress point in front of the host property that would include an off-street parking space and an electric vehicle charging point. This would be in an 'in and out' arrangement to allow exiting vehicles to do so in a forward gear.
4. I observed on my site visit, which coincided with the morning peak traffic period that Reading Road is relatively busy. The Council has set out that the average speed recorded from data in 2013 and 2015 were 28-29 mph and the 85th percentile speed used for determining design speed was 33 mph. Although this is somewhat dated, based on my own observations at the site visit, I consider that vehicle speeds have not significantly reduced at the present time and such speeds offer a reasonable basis to consider visibility splays. The Council has set out that based on this, visibility splays should be 2.4 metres by at least 43 metres, in accordance with Manual for Streets, 2007.
5. The proposed layout design includes two access and egress points, which I will refer to as the northern and southern accesses. The drawings

provided with the application show that the northern access would have visibility splays of 2.4 metres by 11 metres to the left and 2.4 metres by 23 metres to the right and the southern access 2.4 metres by 24 metres to the left and 2.4 metres by 26 metres to the right. This would be much less than guidance suggests should be provided and is largely down to the siting of the appeal site on the inside of a bend.

6. It is clear from the submitted drawings that the off-street parking bay has limited depth and subsequently, the angle that the vehicles would enter/exit the driveway would be shallow. As a result of this, drivers would need to look over their shoulder when exiting either egress point. I consider that this, along with the shorter (some significantly) than expected visibility splay distances due to the appeal site's siting and the busy nature of Reading Road in this location would result in unacceptable risk to highway safety through vehicle collisions. This is despite the number of vehicle movements associated with one dwelling being fairly low.
7. I acknowledge that Manual for Streets is guidance and that it acknowledges that unless there is local evidence to the contrary, a reduction in visibility below recommended levels will not necessarily lead to a significant problem. However, it is the combination of circumstances set out above that results in my significant concerns about the proposed layout.
8. Swept-path analysis has also been provided for the proposed northern and southern access and egress points. This shows that a large vehicle exiting the northern access seeking to travel south, would find it difficult to do so in one movement. This could lead to such a vehicle having to make several movements to turn and would need to do so across both lanes of traffic. In addition, both medium and large vehicles exiting the southern access traveling northwest would need to cross both lanes of traffic to be able to do so. I observed that there is a solid white line in this location. I consider that this could also lead to an unacceptable risk of vehicle collisions, particularly coupled with the sub-standard visibility for both access points.
9. The appellant is of the view that such movements would likely be limited, with most seeing vehicles either enter the southern access and exiting the northern access heading northwest or entering the northern access and exiting the southern access heading southeast. Whilst this might be so, there is no way of ensuring this would always be the case. In addition, I consider it unlikely that a vehicle having to exit the northern access who is seeking to travel southeast would head northwest and then turn around to then travel southeast due to its inconvenience.
10. The appellant has pointed out that there has only been one slight accident recorded in the area of the appeal site. Whilst this is acknowledged, clearly the current highway environment does not include

the proposed development and I agree with the Council that there is no guarantee that such a trend would continue. Subsequently and given my significant concerns above, I am not of the view that the lack of previous accidents provides any justification for the scheme.

11. My attention has been drawn to other existing access points in close proximity to the appeal site, which the appellant points out are sub-standard and in some cases require vehicles to reverse into the road. Whilst this is noted, I am mindful that such arrangements are likely to have been permitted many years ago and I do not consider the presence of other sub-standard accesses provides any justification for allowing more.
12. Specific details have been provided for the access arrangement for the neighbouring property at Berins Ridge, which was consented in 2010 (Ref 10/00197/HOUSE). Highway officers raised no concerns with this access despite its substandard visibility as it provided a betterment to the existing arrangement and allowed vehicles to access and egress in a forward gear. However, this scheme does not accommodate an existing vehicular access that would be improved. Consequently, it is not comparable to this scheme.
13. It has been suggested that the majority of drivers and other road users on the A329 are familiar with the local area and will therefore travel with due care and attention knowing the conditions and the number of driveway accesses. However, there is no evidence to support the assertion that most drivers will be local, particularly given the A329 is a link road between Reading and the A34 south of Oxford.
14. The use of highway mirrors has been suggested by the appellant as a means of mitigation. However, this would likely require them being sited on highway land and the highway authority has set out that they would not be permitted. Such mitigation does therefore not appear to be deliverable. Further, I observed the existing convex mirrors used by other properties close to the appeal site and I am not of the view that these would be sufficient to overcome my concerns.
15. The appellant has referred me to numerous other appeal decisions where Inspectors have accepted layouts where less than suggested visibility splays would be provided. I have considered the circumstances of each of these. However, I am mindful that each case must be considered on its merits and none of those cases share the same specific circumstances as this case, which has led to my conclusion that there would be unacceptable highway safety risk. The other appeal decisions therefore do not affect my overall conclusion.
16. There has been a suggestion that parked vehicles, such as that of the appellant's along Church Lane could cause highway safety concerns. However, there is no evidence before me to support such a view, particularly as it is a no through road and would not see a large number of vehicle movements.

17. I accept that the off-street parking bay for the appellant and the facilitation of the use of an electric vehicle in the future would be benefits of the scheme. Further, I acknowledge that there would also be some improvements associated with removing the need for vulnerable road users to cross the road and in terms of visibility from the neighbouring property through the removal of the boundary wall. However, I do not consider such matters either individually or in combination outweigh the identified unacceptable highway safety risk.
18. Overall, the proposal would lead to an unacceptable risk to highway safety contrary to Policy CS13 of the West Berkshire District Core Strategy, 2012 and Paragraph 111 of the National Planning policy Framework, 2021.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

Jonathan Manning

INSPECTOR