



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 February 2022

by L J O'Brien BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 June 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/21/3277933

Pumping Station Adjacent 20 Chazey Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7DS

- 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 Michael and Ann Rosier against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 200718, dated 27 May 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 January 2021.
 - The development proposed is demolition of former pumping house and new dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter and Main Issues

2. The Council originally included the effect of the proposal on the provision of affordable housing as a reason for refusing the application as no Section 106 agreement to provide a financial contribution in this respect had been provided. However, a Unilateral Undertaking has since been provided and the Council are confident that this reason for refusal has now been satisfied. Consequently the main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including the effect on the adjacent Major Landscape Feature; and
 - whether or not the proposal would maintain, protect, consolidate, extend or enhance the green network or protect the priority woodland habitat.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is a fairly constrained site adjacent to an area of woodland on Chazey Road. The site currently houses a small, single storey, pumping station. The proposal is for the demolition of the pumping station and the construction of a new dwelling.

Character and appearance

4. Chazey road is a residential road comprising a variety of dwellings. However, a key characteristic of the area is the traditional appearance of the properties in respect of their design and materials. The properties are generally large, though I note that there are a number of bungalows, and are set back from the road behind front garden areas with consistent boundary treatments and mature trees and planting. Plots sizes are typically substantial. The above

features result in a verdant sense of spaciousness and a traditional character and appearance.

5. The proposed dwelling would be set back from the road behind an area of parking but would include minimal planting and would fail to reflect the boundary treatments which are prevalent along the rest of the road. Furthermore, the dwelling would occupy a significant proportion of the plot with its built form and would, in this context, appear as a cramped addition to the street scene which would fail to assimilate well with the sense of spaciousness which characterises the area.
6. The northern and eastern boundaries of the site adjoin woodland which is designated as a Major Landscape Feature in the adopted Core Strategy. The Council have expressed concern that the siting of the proposed house would cut into the area of woodland where it adjoins Chazey Road, potentially undermining the integrity of this feature. Whilst evidence provided by the appellant is clear that there are currently no significant trees on the site itself or within close proximity to the site I note that the Council have stated that the woodland needs space to develop and 'layers' of planting to be allowed to grow. I also note the Council's concern that future pressure to lop or fell trees from occupiers of the proposed dwelling could cause harm to the woodland. Given the close proximity of the proposed dwelling to the woodland I consider it likely that future pressure could be such so as to cause undue harm to the integrity of the woodland. As such, in my view, the proposal would have an adverse effect on the integrity of the woodland.
7. I also note the Council's concerns regarding the interruption to views of the woodland which would occur as a result of the proposal. However, in my view the woodland is substantially mature and would remain visible in views along the street. Though the proposed building would be significantly more visible than the existing pumping station, I do not consider that it would be so disruptive so as to cause harm in this regard.
8. I acknowledge that the proposed dwelling itself is of an innovative and attractive modern design. However, within the context of the wider street scene it would appear as a visually jarring development which would not sit comfortably with other properties in the area. As such, the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area.
9. For the reasons set out above I consider that the proposal would be contrary to Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 (LP). Amongst other things this policy states that development must be of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. This includes an assessment of layout: urban structure and urban grain, landscape, density and mix, scale: height and massing and architectural details and materials.
10. The proposal would also fail to accord with the aims of Policy EN13 of the LP which states that planning permission will not be granted for any development which would detract from the character or appearance of a Major Landscape Feature.

Habitats

11. The adjacent woodland is a priority habitat and a Reading Biodiversity Action Plan habitat. A green link crosses the site. The woodland is considered to be a significant ecological asset and an important part of Reading's Green Network. Policy EN12 of the LP states that the identified Green Network shall be maintained, protected, consolidated, extended and enhanced. The policy goes on to say that permission will not be granted for development that negatively affects the sites with identified interest or fragments the overall network.
12. The development would infill the gap between the adjacent woodland and the existing row of houses. I acknowledge that, at present, the appellant's evidence suggests that the site appears to be of limited ecological value given its current condition, as is supported by the Ecological Assessments provided. I also recognise the appellant's view that the development on site would lead to some enhancement of the ecological value of the site. However, in my view, at present the site does contain natural greenery, acts as a buffer between the woodland and the neighbouring housing and facilitates a degree of openness due to the small scale of the building on site.
13. The proposal would introduce larger scale built form and residential use where none currently exists. Though I note that at present a building does exist within that gap it is markedly smaller and of a considerably different, and less intensive, use than the proposed dwelling. The proposal would be close to the adjacent woodland and the buffer zone of semi-natural habitat which currently exists would be eroded. The activities associated with a residential dwelling would also be more disruptive to surrounding wildlife, despite the mitigation proposed by the appellant, than the existing site and building. Furthermore, the proximity of the development would be such that there would be the potential for the introduction of non-native species into the woodland. I also consider that the proposal would be likely to lead to potential future pressure to lop or fell trees; the impact of such pressure on the ecological value of the woodland would add to the concerns expressed above. Additionally, I consider that the Green Link would be fragmented by the proposal to the detriment of the wider green network.
14. The cumulative effect of these considerations would, in my view, cause the degradation of the adjacent priority woodland habitat. For these reasons I consider that the proposal would not maintain, protect, consolidate, extend or enhance the green network or protect the priority woodland habitat as required by Policy EN12.
15. Policy EN12 states that in circumstances where harm to biodiversity has been found and there are exceptional circumstances where the need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site the development must provide off-site compensation to ensure that there is no net loss of biodiversity. However, in this instance I have not been provided with compelling evidence to suggest that exceptional circumstances exist or that an off-site contribution would lead to no net loss.
16. The development would also fall short of the expectations of The National Planning Policy Framework which promotes the protection and enhancement of sites of biodiversity and expects development to minimise impacts on, and provide net gains, for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.

Other Matters

17. The addition of a new dwelling which would contribute towards the housing supply in the area would undoubtedly be a benefit of the scheme. The contribution towards affordable housing would also be a benefit. I also acknowledge the economic benefits of engaging local professionals, trades and suppliers and the ongoing benefit of the occupiers of the proposed dwelling utilising local facilities. These benefits are, however, limited by the small scale of the proposal and must be considered in that context. Therefore, the cumulative benefits associated with the additional dwelling, would not outweigh the harm I have identified above.
18. A number of concerns around the handling of the planning application by the Council have been raised by the appellant. However, issues such as this are outside of the remit of this appeal and must be pursued through the Council's own complaints process.
19. I have given careful regard to all of the above considerations. However, none are sufficient to dissuade me from the conclusions I have reached that the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and would fail to maintain, protect, consolidate, extend or enhance the green network or protect the priority woodland habitat.

Conclusion

20. The proposal would not accord with the development plan when it is considered as a whole and I have not identified any material considerations which indicate that the appeal should be allowed. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

L J O'Brien

INSPECTOR

