



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 October 2022

by Juliet Rogers BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 07 November 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/22/3300853

53 Barkham Road, Wokingham RG41 2RG

- 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 Dr F Benjamin of Grace Developers Limited against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 220764, dated 9 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 3 May 2022.
 - The development proposed is single storey rear, two storey side and first floor extension and conversion to 2no semi-detached dwellings, following demolition of the existing garage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues of this appeal are:
 - the effect of the proposed parking arrangement on highway safety with regard to the users of Barkham Road;
 - whether the development would encourage future occupiers to use alternative transport to the private car, with particular regard to the provision of bicycle storage facilities; and
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Highway safety

3. The appeal site is located off Barkham Road, a 30mph classified road on a bus route. At the time of my site visit (09:00), there was a steady flow of traffic travelling in both directions, with pedestrians walking on either side of the road towards and away from the town centre. On-street parking is restricted by double yellow lines and other roads nearby are limited to residents parking only. The existing front driveway has sufficient area for two cars to park and manoeuvre onto the busy¹ Barkham Road in a forward gear.
4. The size of the proposed shared driveway and parking space arrangement is such that vehicles would not be able to manoeuvre and leave the site in a

¹ Based on the 2020 traffic count taken at a location further along Barkham Road indicating an average of over 12,000 vehicles travel along the road every weekday.

forward gear. Therefore, drivers would be required to reverse across the pavement onto the highway. When reversing out, the position of the driver would be further away from the pavement than in a forward gear. As a result, the sightlines required to provide adequate visibility to enable drivers to see pedestrians on the pavement would be longer. As hedges are proposed to both the side boundaries at the front, combined with the existing hedge, this view would be obstructed. Additionally, such a manoeuvre would impact the flow of traffic along the road.

5. In a similar way, reversing into the proposed driveway from Barkham Road would impede the flow of road and pavement traffic. Given the adjacent access lane for 51A-51D and 51G Barkham Road, other road users would not be anticipating future occupiers of the appeal scheme reversing into the proposed driveway.
6. My attention has been drawn to other examples of similar parking arrangements in the area. Based on my observations during my site visit, as these examples did not include a shared driveway arrangement, and provided space for fewer cars, they are not directly comparable to the proposed development. Additionally, I have limited evidence before me concerning the planning regime these examples were assessed against. Regardless of this, the presence of such arrangements is not a reason to allow development which would cause further harm to the safety of highway users of Barkham Road.
7. Therefore, the proposed development would cause significant harm to the safety of users of the highway. It would be contrary to the requirements of Policies CP1 and CP6 of the Core Strategy², CC07 of the Local Plan³ and the SPD⁴. These policies, amongst other things, require new development to provide appropriate vehicular parking, ensuring traffic safety and sited to minimise any impact on the safety of the public realm. It would also conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in respect of achieving well-designed places that are safe and accessible.
8. In the decision notice the Council refer to Policy CC03 of the Local Plan. As this concerns the provision and enhancement of green corridors, it is not determinative in this main issue.

Bicycle storage

9. Although the proposed development includes bicycle storage, future occupiers of the dwelling adjacent to the access lane would have to take their bicycles through the property to a rear located storage area. Whilst a 'straightforward' route, this would be an inconvenient arrangement for future occupiers. It would also limit the flexibility of the internal space as a gap of an appropriate width is retained and increase the potential for damage to internal walls and furniture. In my experience, this would not encourage future occupiers to travel by bicycle.
10. Despite the appeal site's accessible location and, whilst it may be usual for many semi detached properties not to have a side alleyway into the garden, these are not reasons to allow development contrary to policy. Additionally, the

² Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework – Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2010)

³ Wokingham Borough Development Plan – Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014)

⁴ Wokingham Borough Council Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2012)

presence of other similar bicycle storage in the area does not make this arrangement acceptable.

11. Whilst there is a possibility of installing a side gate for the property closest to the access lane, these details did not form part of the planning application. Therefore, based on the limited information before me, I cannot be certain interested parties would not be prejudiced if I considered this as part of this appeal.
12. I conclude that the proposed bicycle storage arrangement would not support opportunities for reducing the need to travel by private car and, as such, would be contrary to Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy in this respect. It would also conflict with the SPD which requires convenient bicycle storage to be provided to encourage bicycle ownership and use. Similarly, I find conflict with Chapter 9 of the Framework which aims to promote sustainable transport. I attribute moderate harm to this main issue.

Character and appearance

13. The appeal dwelling forms the end of a short row of bungalows set back from Barkham Road behind driveways and front gardens. Although limited landscape features are present in other front gardens, the existing trees and hedge at the front of the appeal site punctuates the row. This creates a verdant feature in the streetscene before the character changes beyond the access lane, with two storey buildings sited closer to the pavement.
14. As Barkham Road is part of a green route, Policy CC03 of the Local Plan seeks to protect and retain the existing trees, hedges and other landscape features along the road. This policy also requires new development to incorporate high quality planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme. Whilst part of the existing hedge would be retained, given most of the front garden would be required for parking, space available for new and existing planting would be limited. As such, although the details of a landscape scheme could be conditioned, I am not persuaded that there is sufficient space to accommodate further planting as well as the parking spaces and turning area required.
15. The proposed extensions would reflect the variety in architectural styles, including pitched roof features, in the local area, and be subservient to the existing bungalow. As such, they would not harm the character and appearance of the appeal dwelling.
16. The appellant would be able to make changes to the front garden of the property without the need for planning permission, including the removal of the existing landscape features on the site. However, I have limited evidence before me to indicate that this is likely as a result of my decision, or that hard surfacing would be laid to the same extent as the appeal scheme.
17. I conclude that the proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. As such, it would be contrary to policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy and Policy CC03 of the Local Plan. These policies, amongst other things, require new development to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment by contributing to a sense of place, including the use of appropriate landscaping.

18. I also find conflict with the guidance contained in the SPD which promotes the incorporation of existing landscape features within new development alongside new planting, including to soften parking areas.
19. In the decision notice, the Council also refer to Policy CC01 of the Local Plan which relates to the presumption in favour of sustainable development, reflecting the approach contained in the Framework. Whilst not determinative in this main issue, I refer to this within my Planning Balance below.

Other Matters

20. I note the favourable comments from Council officers. However, this has not altered by assessment of the planning merits of the appeal scheme.
21. My attention has been drawn to another appeal in the borough⁵. As this appeal concerns a scheme comprising larger benefits and the Inspector considered that the relevant policies relating to development limits were inconsistent with the Framework, it is not directly comparable to this case.

Planning Balance

22. The proposed development would accord with policies relating to housing provision. However, given the net gain of one dwelling, the appeal scheme's contribution to the local housing mix and supply, plus the social and economic benefits through the construction and occupation of the properties would be small. I have found that the proposal would lead to significant harm to highways safety and character and appearance, and moderate harm resulting from the failure to provide appropriate cycle facilities. The development plan policies relating to these matters are broadly consistent with the Framework. As such, I give the conflict with these policies substantial weight and conclude that the appeal scheme is contrary to the development plan as a whole.
23. As the Council are no longer able to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites, the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in paragraph 11dii is engaged. The proposal would align with the Framework's aim to increase the supply of housing and, as a small-scale development, could make an important, and quick, contribution to meeting the housing requirement. Additionally, the site is in a location accessible to services and facilities and the proposed development would result in an efficient use of brownfield land. Notwithstanding this, I have found that the proposed development would be contrary to the Framework in respect of the requirement to achieve well-designed places that are safe and accessible, promote the use of sustainable transport and sympathetic to local character.
24. Therefore, the identified adverse impacts of the proposed development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole.

Conclusion

25. The proposed development conflicts with the development plan and there are no other considerations, either individually or in combination, including the Framework and its presumption in favour of sustainable development, that outweigh this conflict.

⁵ APP/X0360/Ww21/3275086

26. For the reasons identified above, the appeal is dismissed.

Juliet Rogers

INSPECTOR