



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 January 2023

by M. P. Howell BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 February 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/W/22/3308686

31 Wood Lane, Sonning Common, Reading RG4 9SJ

- 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 Jagjit Singh Rai against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref P22/S1274/FUL, dated 4 April 2022, was refused by notice dated 2 August 2022.
 - The development proposed is the change of use and extension of 31 Wood Lane from offices (Use Class E) to 7 residential dwellings (Use Class C3).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background and Main Issues

2. The site is subject to a planning approval for an alternative scheme, which incorporated extensions to the side and rear of the building and comprises 6 flats¹. Works have commenced on site but were still on going at the time of my site visit. The Council has indicated that the works carried out were sufficient to constitute a lawful commencement of the scheme. As such, the 2018 consent can be considered a reliable fall-back position.
3. In view of the above, the main issues of the appeal are the effect of the proposed development on:
 - the character and appearance of the area
 - Whether the proposed development would provide adequate accommodation for future occupants, with regard to outdoor space.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. The appeal site is close to retail units that are situated centrally on Wood Lane, but the area is largely residential with a mix of dwelling types and sizes. Although varied, the dwellings, for the most part, front the road and are set back behind gardens and driveways with good spacing in-between. They are set within spacious plots with long rear gardens. The simple pattern of development, low density and spacing in between provides some uniformity and sense of space that positively contributes to the character and appearance of the area. Despite being a former office use, the original building is a simple

¹ P18/S4256/FUL

two storey red brick property fronting Wood Lane. Aside from the extensive side to rear single storey extensions, the domestic scale and appearance of the building has been maintained and together with the spacious plot and spacing in-between, it adds value to the character and appearance of the area.

5. It is acknowledged that the proposed extensions would be largely concealed from wider public vantage points along the Wood Lane. However, the scale, height, depth, and massing of the proposed side to rear first floor extension and single storey flat roof rear extension would be substantial within the plot. The extensions and layout would produce a notably smaller plot with an increased level of built form and density that is not readily present within the context of Wood Lane. In this context, the proposed development would appear cramped, at odds with the low density and spacious plots that are valuable to the character and appearance of the area.
6. Accordingly, the proposed development would have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area, contrary to Policies DES1 and DES2 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2020 (LP) and Policy D1 of the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan 2021-2035 (NP) as well as the Joint South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council Design Guide 2022 (Design Guide). These policies and guidance, require proposals to demonstrate that the design respects the local context working with and complementing the density, grain, and details of the surrounding area.

Living conditions

7. Policy DES5 of the LP refers to shared outdoor amenity space, requiring space to be provided for all developments and should be based on the size of the dwellings and the character of the area. In Section 4 of The Design Guide, it recommends that the minimum size of private amenity space should be 40 sqm for shared communal space for flats. However, this is not a strict size, as regard must also be had to the character of the area. Spaces should also not be an awkward shape, accessible and avoid entrances where parking, storage and refuse areas are facilitated.
8. I acknowledge that that many properties have been altered along Wood Lane, however, based on the evidence before me and the observations on my site visit, the predominate character of the area is low density development with spacious plots and ample outdoor spaces. Although the shared communal space is accessible and flat, it would not meet the minimum size required, and it has not been designed to consider the character of the area.
9. I have also had regard to the accessible location and the availability of recreational facilities within proximity of the site. Whilst the proximity of such facilities and open space is a benefit, it does not provide the same degree of private and useable space that is required for basic needs such as sitting out, drying clothes and outside storage. In my judgement, the lack of a sufficiently sized outdoor space would undermine the quality of the accommodation and living conditions of future occupants.
10. I, therefore, conclude that the proposed development would result in substandard living conditions for the future occupants, with regard to the size of the private outdoor space, contrary to the aims of Policy DES1 and DES5 of the LP and the Council Design Guide. These policies, and guidance, seeks to ensure that all new residential units are of a high quality in design and provide

functional, accessible, safe, and adequately sized private garden spaces for the type of accommodation proposed and the character of the area.

Other Matters

11. I have regard to the fall-back position of the 2018 consent when making my decision. However, 2018 consent would form smaller extensions and a reduced density, which would result in a greater level of outdoor space that could be utilised by the future occupiers. As such, the 2018 scheme is less harmful in respect of the impact on the character and appearance of the area and level of outdoor space for future occupiers.
12. The appellant has queried whether the Council has approved any external outdoor space as part of the 2018, particularly given the plan is not annotated and it is not outdoor space is not conditioned. However, in my view, outdoor space is not always annotated, and it is not typical to specifically condition outdoor space to serve a development. Nevertheless, for the reasons set out above, the 2018 consent would be less harmful and whether the provision of the external space could be enforced falls outside the remit of the appeal and would be a matter for the Council to investigate.

Conclusion

13. For the reasons given above and taking into account the development plan as a whole and all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

M. P. Howell

INSPECTOR