



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 July 2023

by Lewis Condé Msc, Bsc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 July 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/23/3315026

544 Wokingham Road, Earley, Reading RG6 7JB

- 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 C. Larrison against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 221892, dated 19 June 2022, was refused by notice dated 22 July 2022.
 - The development proposed is described as 'Proposed Erection of 2 Bedroom Single-storey Dwelling and Carport on land to the Rear of 544 Wokingham Road, Earley, Reading, RG6 7JB'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development in the banner heading above is taken directly from the original planning application form.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are: a) the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and b) whether the proposed development would provide suitable living conditions for future residents with specific reference to outdoor amenity space.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. No. 544 Wokingham Road (no. 544) is a semi-detached bungalow located on a long, predominantly residential, street that also acts as a main thoroughfare in the area. The existing dwelling is set back from the highway and served by a sizeable rear garden.
5. The surrounding area has an urban residential character. Neighbouring residential properties have a strong linear arrangement, with dwellings set behind front gardens and displaying frontage onto the street. Many are also served by relatively long rear gardens. Overall, this gives the area a relatively formal but spacious character and appearance. There are several examples of garages and ancillary domestic outbuildings to the rear of neighbouring properties (including a sizeable outbuilding on an adjacent plot). However, I did not observe any other example of backland residential dwellings nearby, nor have any been brought to my attention.

6. The appeal scheme would split the plot to the rear of no. 544 to allow space for the proposed new single storey dwelling. This would result in both properties sitting within broadly similar sized plots. However, both plots would be significantly smaller than those serving the majority of nearby properties along Wokingham Road. The development's position, to the rear of no. 544 and accessed to the side of the host dwelling, would also be at odds with the linear pattern of development on the street. Indeed, the lack of road frontage would be in marked contrast to the surrounding built form, and neither reflect nor respect, the existing established layout of development.
7. I appreciate that the proposed dwelling would not be prominent in the street scene. Nonetheless, it would be an incongruous development that would fail to observe the character and layout of the existing surrounding built form, whilst the proposal would also be experienced from surrounding dwellings. Furthermore, my concerns with the proposed layout of the development could not be suitably addressed through landscaping measures.
8. Overall, I find that the proposal would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Council Local Development Framework – Core Strategy Development Plan Document (adopted 2010) (Core Strategy) and Policies CC01 and TB06 of the Wokingham Borough Development Plan – Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (adopted 2014) (MDD). Together, amongst other matters, these policies seek to ensure that development is of a high-quality design, sensitive to its context, which would maintain or improve the character and appearance of the area.
9. The appeal scheme would also not adhere to the aims of the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (adopted 2012) (SPD). In specific reference to backland developments, the SPD identifies that proposals must not harm the existing character of the local area and should relate positively to the existing layout and built form.

Living Conditions

10. The proposed dwelling would be served by a rear garden of limited depth (approximately 6m). This falls significantly below the expected minimum standard that is outlined within the SPD. From my observations on site, there is considerable mature vegetation to the rear boundary (off-site). Together, this vegetation, the position of the proposed dwelling, and shallow depth of the rear garden are likely to result in the proposed rear garden largely being in shade throughout the day. This coupled with its very small scale would make it a rather gloomy and impractical space for any future residents to utilise or enjoy.
11. The appellant indicates that an area of appropriate useable garden would also be provided to the front of the proposed dwelling. It is suggested that this space would be private due to it being substantially enclosed including via the proposed carport to serve the appeal scheme.
12. The proposed car port and boundary arrangements may restrict views of the front garden space, but I still consider that it is likely to be somewhat overlooked by the rear elevation of adjoining neighbouring properties. In any case, the orientation and close relationship that this garden space would share with the rear elevations of neighbouring properties is such that future residents are likely to experience a perception of being overlooked in this area.

Additionally, the area of front garden that would be of practical use would also be rather small and largely dominated by the vehicle access arrangements and the proposed car port. I therefore consider that the outdoor amenity space that the appeal scheme would provide is of insufficient quality, whilst I am not convinced that this could be suitably overcome through suggested landscaping arrangements.

13. Consequently, I find that the proposal would not provide suitable living conditions for future residence in terms of the provision of outdoor amenity space. The proposal is therefore contrary to Core Strategy Policies CP1 and CP3, as well as the advice of the SPD. Together these policies and guidance, amongst other matters, seek to ensure that development provides attractive, functionable schemes that provide suitable amenity for future occupiers.
14. Likewise, it would not adhere to the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in respect of providing a high standard of amenity for future users.

Other Matters

15. It is not disputed that the appeal site is a sustainable location for development. Likewise, the proposal may not raise concerns in respect of other matters including the living conditions of neighbouring residents, ecology, energy efficiency, heritage, flood risk or highway issues. However, this is to be expected of new development and therefore does not weigh in favour of the appeal scheme.
16. No robust evidence has been provided to support the appellant's claim that the proposal will enable the enhancement of flora and fauna, or to demonstrate the level of enhancement that may take place. I therefore give negligible weight to this line of argument, and it does not overcome my concerns with the appeal scheme.
17. The proposed development would provide socio-economic benefits associated with the construction and provision of a new dwelling. This includes the potential for new residents to support local facilities/services. Given the scale of the proposal, I consider such benefits would be limited and do not outweigh the identified harm.
18. The appellant has referred to Policy CC01 of the MDD, which sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development in line with that also established under the Framework. For the reasons outlined above I have found the proposal not to accord with the development plan policies. Furthermore, I have been provided with no specific details to suggest that the policies relevant to the application are out of date.
19. I recognise that the Framework encourages the effective use of land, including through increasing development densities. However, given the above identified concerns with the appeal scheme, I do not consider the proposal would make effective use of the site.
20. Finally, a general lack of objections from neighbouring residents is not suitable justification to allow otherwise unacceptable development.

Conclusion

21. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which justify a decision other than in accordance with it. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Lewis Condé

INSPECTOR