



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 September 2023

by C Shearing BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20 October 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/D/23/3316594

The Lodge, Crookham House, Crookham Hill, Crookham Common, Thatcham RG19 8DG

- 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 Averill against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 22/02461/HOUSE, dated 7 October 2022, was refused by notice dated 7 December 2022.
 - The development proposed is extension to existing dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for an extension to the existing dwelling at The Lodge, Crookham House, Crookham Hill, Crookham Common, Thatcham RG19 8DG in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 22/02461/HOUSE, dated 7 October 2022, subject to the conditions set out in the schedule below.

Application for Costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr and Mrs Averill against West Berkshire District Council. This application is the subject of a separate decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the development proposed on: the character and appearance of the area and the host property, and; ecology.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. The appeal site contains a small single storey property set centrally within its curtilage and heavily enclosed by trees and hedgerows. It is in a rural location, adjoining the edge of Crookham Common and areas of dense woodland to the south, and the open grassland and gardens associated with Crookham House to the north.
5. Policy C6 of the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document 2017 (the HSA) contains a presumption in favour of extensions to dwellings in the countryside, provided that its criteria are met. This includes, among other things, that the scale of the enlargement be subservient to the original dwelling and designed to be in character with the existing dwelling. Subservience is not defined. The supporting text describes that there are no 'rules' that can be applied to an acceptable size of an extension as each application has to be

considered on the basis of the impacts on the particular property in that location. It goes on to state that the enlargement of a small rural dwelling will require an assessment of the impact of the development on the local architectural and visual context.

6. Even if the appellant's lower figures were used, the uplift in the internal area of the building would be significant. However, much of this would be contained beneath the ground level, with limited visibility from above ground due to the scale and location of the lightwell and modest ground level rooflights. While the footprint and dimensions of the extension would be larger than those of the main house, it would appear visually distinct due to a low level glazed connection which would allow the old and new parts of the building to remain clearly defined. Its height would respect the remaining building and its materials and elevations would comprise a simple and unintrusive design, allowing the historic features of The Lodge to remain the focal point when entering the site. Overall, and taken together, these features would allow The Lodge to maintain its historic character and appearance and allow the original building to be appreciated. Having considered the effects of the three-dimensional structure, the proposal can be considered subservient and appropriate in design terms.
7. The appellant has provided a Landscape Study (LS) which considers the effects of the proposal in views from the road. This is based on evidence from July, when the foliage of surrounding trees provided nearly full screening of the site. This would inevitably be reduced in winter months. However, even if some visibility of the extension were to occur in glimpses from the road and nearby footpaths, in light of the attributes above the proposal would not cause harm to the character or appearance of the area. The Council accept the extension comprises a high-quality design and the materials would be sympathetic to the rural character of the locality. The modern window to the north facing elevation of the historic building would merge and confuse the relationship between the old and new parts of the building. However, given the heavy enclosure of the north side of the building by trees and boundary treatments, its visual effects would not be significant.
8. The Council suggest the existing building maintains its appearance as a gate lodge to the former Crookham House to the north, which I understand is not statutorily listed. I observed that The Lodge has become both physically and functionally severed from the main house. Their plots are divided by substantial boundary treatments and planting and the access to the house now exists further to the north, shared with a new housing development. In the absence of substantive evidence to the contrary, any connection with the larger estate is no longer apparent and there would not be harmful heritage effects.
9. For the reasons given, the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the area and the host property. It would comply with policies CS14 and CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy 2012 (the CS) and the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) insofar as they relate to the need for high quality design which is sympathetic to local character and the landscape. The proposal would comply with Policy C6 relating to extensions in the countryside, and with the objectives of the supplementary planning documents: House Extensions 2004 and Quality Design 2006. I do not find conflict with policy ADPP3 which contains the delivery plan for the vision for Thatcham.

Ecology

10. The site is adjacent to the Greenham and Crookham Commons Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and close to areas of mature woodland. The Council's officer report raises concerns for the impact of the proposal on protected species, given the condition of the existing buildings which could accommodate birds and bats.
11. The information supporting the appeal includes results of a field survey which found the two buildings on the site to be negligible in terms of their habitat value for roosting bats, and a birds nest was found within the garage. The surrounding dark woodland is identified as excellent for commuting, foraging and roosting bats. Other areas around the site were found to have low ecological value, with the exception of scattered trees which would be retained by the development. The reports consider the likelihood of other protected species being present on the site and I have no reason to doubt the appellant's findings in these respects. The report includes recommendations for biodiversity enhancements appropriate to the context of the site and proportionate to the scale of the development proposed, as a household extension.
12. The appellant's Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) recommends actions to ensure protection of relevant species. Subject to those provisions, the proposal would not cause harm to habitats or protected species nor have adverse effects on the SSSI. In conclusion on this main issue, the proposal would not cause harm to ecology and would deliver appropriate biodiversity enhancements. The proposal would comply with Policy CS17 of the CS which relates to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and the objectives of the Framework relating to habitats and biodiversity.

Conditions

13. I have considered the conditions put forward by the Council and I have had regard to the advice in Planning Practice Guidance and the Framework in respect of conditions. In addition to the time limit condition, I have imposed a condition requiring the development to adhere to the submitted drawings to provide clarity for the parties.
14. For visual and ecological reasons, tree protection measures need to be secured and these need to cover the entirety of the construction process. As I have accepted the appellant's ecological findings, to avoid repetition and having regard to the scale and nature of the development proposed, I have amended the conditions in respect of ecology to align with the recommendations of the appellant's reports. These will ensure submission of details to protect species during construction, secure enhancements, and secure details of external lighting to the extension.
15. As the supporting drawings include an adequate schedule of materials, submission of further details in this respect would not be necessary. In light of the nature of the development proposed, and as off-street parking exists on the site in connection with the existing dwelling, it is not necessary to secure delivery of this. Given the appellant's findings in respect of the existing buildings, I do not consider a condition requiring additional surveys after a specified period would meet the test of necessity or reasonableness. As the

ground levels in relation to the existing building are shown on the plans, and in the absence of evidence to the contrary, details of spoil removal would also not be necessary here.

Conclusion

16. For the above reasons, having taken account of the development plan as a whole, the approach in the Framework, along with all other relevant material considerations, the appeal is allowed.

C Shearing

INSPECTOR

Schedule of Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 200-01/A, 200-02, 200-03, 300-04/B, 300-05/B.
- 3) No development shall commence until tree protection measures have been installed on the site in accordance with the details contained in Section 5 of the Arboricultural Report by Wotton Tree Consultancy dated 16 September 2022. Those measures shall be maintained throughout the construction process.
- 4) Throughout the construction process, including site clearance and ground works, precautionary working methods shall be implemented for reptiles and birds in accordance with the recommendations contained in Section 4 of the Ecological Impact Assessment by Arbtech dated 2 February 2023.
- 5) Within 6 months of the first use of the extension, biodiversity enhancements shall be installed within the site in accordance with details that have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. This shall include provisions for bats, reptiles, birds and hedgehogs and those enhancements shall be maintained thereafter.
- 6) No external lighting shall be installed to the extension unless details have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Those details shall demonstrate consideration for bat movements on the site and any external lighting to the extension shall be installed only in accordance with the details approved.

End of Schedule