



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 08 January 2024

by N Robinson BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 February 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/23/3325238

37 Hilcot Road, Reading RG30 2SX

- 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 Jayten Patel (Westmore Enterprises Ltd) against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 221038/FUL, dated 30 June 2022, was refused by notice dated 23 February 2023.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing building and erection of three new residential dwellings.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. On 19 December 2023, a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published. Those parts of the Framework most relevant to this appeal have not been significantly amended. As a result, I consider that there is no requirement for me to seek further submissions and I am satisfied that no party's interests have been prejudiced by my taking this approach.
3. A completed legal agreement dated 15 January 2024 was submitted during the course of the appeal. This agreement sets out a financial contribution towards off-site affordable housing provision. The Council have confirmed that, following the receipt of this agreement, it would not seek to defend the third reason for refusal which related to whether the proposal makes appropriate provision for affordable housing. The appeal has been determined on this basis.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
 - whether the proposal would provide satisfactory living conditions for future occupiers with particular regard to outlook and levels of daylight.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal site is located at the end of Hilcot Road, a cul de sac of 2-storey terraced houses which are set back from the road behind small front gardens. Whilst there are varying architectural styles and building forms within the

surrounding area, the dwellings on Hilcot Road demonstrate a consistent and cohesive design which results in a coherent street frontage. The appeal site comprises a part-single, part 1 ½ storey brick industrial unit which visually closes the road. Given its height and industrial appearance, the building appears as a discordant feature within the residential street scene. To the rear the site borders the rear elevations of the predominantly commercial properties on Oxford Road, where built form extends close to the rear site boundary.

6. The proposed residential units would be set back from the site frontage, in keeping with the residential use and the layout of properties in Hilcot Road. The units would be consistent with the height of the neighbouring properties and would incorporate a traditional pattern of window and door openings and palette of materials.
7. The proposed units would incorporate projecting gables to the front elevation, each of which would be of a different width. This would appear as a discordant feature within the traditional terraced street scene which is not characterised by these features. Given the limited extent of proposed landscaping and the site's prominent location, the gables would be readily apparent in views from the street scene where the development would appear as unsympathetic and unduly prominent, interrupting the consistent architectural appearance of the terrace and weakening the established local character and appearance.
8. Furthermore, the proposal would bring built form closer to the northern site boundary and there would be limited separation between the proposed units and neighbouring built form. Whilst this would not be perceptible from the street scene, nonetheless it would be clearly visible from the windowed rear elevations of nearby properties on Oxford Road where the limited separation to the site boundaries would result in a cramped and contrived appearance.
9. I acknowledge that previous applications for residential development at the site¹ were found to be acceptable in design terms. However, based on the information before me, the proposed articulation of the front elevation differs from that of the previous proposals, as does the proposed footprint and proximity to the rear site boundary. Thus, previous proposals do not appear to be directly comparable, and therefore do not provide a justification for the appeal proposal.
10. In light of the above, the proposal would not satisfactorily integrate with the character and appearance of the surrounding area and would therefore conflict with Policy CC7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) (LP), which requires all developments to be of a high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area. I also find conflict with the Framework which requires that developments are sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment.
11. My attention has been drawn to LP Policy H14, which gives policy support to the renewal and regeneration of Reading's suburban residential areas where it would, amongst other matters, improve the local built environment. As I have found that the proposal would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area, the proposal therefore gains no support from this policy.

Living conditions

¹ APP/E0345/A/08/2082248, 111498/EXT and 150238/FUL (appeal ref APP/E0345/08/2082248)

12. Units 1 and 3 have an open plan kitchen and living room at ground floor level. The front parts of these rooms would receive adequate levels of natural light from the south-facing windows in the front elevation. However, given the limited separation between window openings in the rear elevation and the boundary wall, the north-facing windows would provide limited levels of natural light to the rear parts of these open plan rooms. The proposed rooflights are small and would provide limited additional natural light to these areas. Whilst it may well be the case that the proposed layout is a response to site constraints, nonetheless, on the basis of the information before me, the rear parts of these rooms would be provided with inadequate levels of natural light.
13. Additionally, the outlook from the rear windows would be dominated by the boundary wall at close range, resulting in a poor and oppressive outlook. I acknowledge that the front parts of these rooms would provide a better outlook, however this would not be sufficient to overcome the substandard outlook from the rear parts of these rooms.
14. Drawing together the above, the living spaces in the rear parts of the open plan rooms to units 1 and 3 would be dark and uninviting spaces in which to spend time with poor outlook, to the detriment of the living conditions of future occupants. Therefore, the proposal would conflict with those aims of LP Policy CC8 which resists development that would have unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties with regard to, among other things, daylight/sunlight and outlook.

Other Matters

15. The proposal would provide 3 units of accommodation on a brownfield site in a sustainable location at low risk of flooding. The proposal would make a useful contribution to local housing needs in accordance with the Government's objective to significantly boost the supply of homes and the small residential units may appeal to first time buyers. Additionally, the proposal would make a meaningful contribution towards off-site affordable housing provision.
16. There would be short-term economic benefits associated with construction and potential support for shops, local facilities and public transport in the longer term. These factors weigh in favour of the scheme. Given the small scale of the development I attach limited weight to the development's positive contributions to the social and economic objectives of the Framework.
17. The main parties agree that the loss of the existing warehouse use would be beneficial to the amenity of existing nearby occupiers in terms of removal of a source of potential noise and disturbance. I see no reason to take a different view. This factor weighs in favour of the scheme. I have also taken into account the benefits of the proposal put forward by the appellant including the provision of facilities for the washing and drying of clothes and the inclusion of level thresholds. However, these benefits are limited by the scale of the proposal.
18. The Council found that the proposal would make adequate provision for cycle parking and refuse storage and would be likely to meet with the relevant development plan policies in relation to car parking provision. The Council found that the proposed layout would meet the Nationally Described Space Standards and raised no concerns regarding drainage, contaminated land, air quality, ecological impacts or the effect upon the living conditions of

neighbouring residents. However, compliance with relevant planning policies on these matters would be required in any case and therefore these matters do not therefore weigh in favour of the proposal.

19. I note that the floors between flats would be of adequate acoustic performance and that construction would be well insulated. However, these are a mandatory requirement of Building Regulations and so cannot be considered as a benefit of this proposal.
20. I appreciate that the appellant has attempted to overcome the concerns raised by the Council during a previous planning application² including a reduction in the scale and quantum of development and amendments to the design and layout. However, the amendments would still result in a proposal that would harm the character and appearance of the area and would fail to provide adequate living conditions for future occupants for the reasons outlined.
21. The appellant states that the existing use contributes to the parking congestion along Hilcot Road and that the proposal would reduce trip generation and parking pressure and deliver improvements in highway safety. However, I have not been provided with any evidence in support of this. I note that the Council's Transport Development Control Advisor commented that under the Borough's current parking standards, the proposal would generate additional pressure for parking in the area. This matter does not therefore weigh in favour of the proposal.
22. The appellant states that precedents exist in the immediate area for this type of conversion. However, I have not been supplied with any details of these proposals to give substantial credence to.

Conclusion

23. The proposal conflicts with the development plan when taken as a whole and there are no material considerations, either individually or in combination, that outweigh the identified harm and associated development plan conflict. Therefore, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

N Robinson

INSPECTOR

² Application reference 210545/FUL