
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 February 2024

by Rebecca McAndrew, BA Hons, MSc, PG Dip Urban Design, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20.03.2024

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/23/3324664

Cedar Lodge, Soke Road, Silchester, Reading, West Berkshire RG7 2PB

- 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 D Irwin against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref 22/02496/FULMAJ, dated 12 October 2022, was refused by notice dated 31 January 2023.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a replacement dwelling and a garage following the removal of the existing; with associated parking, turning, landscaping, private amenity space and access.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The Council's second reason for refusal states that the appellants have failed to submit a Flood Risk Assessment in support of the proposed development. This is required for sites over 1 hectare within Flood Zone 1 by Policy CS16 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Development Plan Document (2012) (CS). However, the appellants confirm that this assessment was included within the Design and Access Statement submitted as part of the planning application. I have therefore considered the appeal on the basis of this assessment.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are;
 - i. The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the site and area; and
 - ii. Whether the proposal is acceptable in terms of flood risk.

Reasons

4. Policy C7 of West Berkshire Council Housing Site and Allocations Development Plan Document 2006 – 2026 (2017) (HSAD) requires replacement dwellings to be proportionate in size and scale to the existing dwelling. Taken together, Policy C7 and Policy CS19 of the CS seek to protect rural character.

5. The appeal property comprises Cedar Lodge, a residential property located in open countryside. It is a modest chalet property, and the appeal proposal is for a large two-storey replacement home. I note that Policy C7 does not quantify what constitutes 'proportionate'. However, the footprint, height, mass and bulk of the proposed dwelling would be significantly larger than existing. As such, in my view, the replacement property would not be proportionate in scale to the original house.
6. The existing property sits comfortably in the landscape, largely due to its modest scale and dominant weathered roof at first floor level. When travelling along Soke Road, there are glimpses of the dwelling through trees at the front of the site, but it is not overly prominent. By contrast the much larger mass and bulk of the proposed dwelling, finished in render, would undoubtedly be more visible and unacceptably prominent. As such, the appeal proposal would unacceptably impact the character of the site and rural area.
7. I conclude that the replacement dwelling would not be proportionate to the original property. It would be overly prominent and would unduly harm the character and appearance of the site and rural area. Therefore, the proposal would fail to meet the requirements of HSAD Policy C7 and CS Policy CS19.

Flood Risk

8. The appellants have provided a Flood Risk Assessment which confirms several measures for dealing with surface water drainage at the site. It also states that the risk of flooding is limited to a small area towards the front of the site and therefore flood resistance and resilience plans are unlikely to be necessary.
9. In view of the above and given that the appeal relates to a single replacement dwelling, I am satisfied that a satisfactory solution could reasonably be achieved. If the appeal were otherwise acceptable, a suitably worded condition could be used to secure details of a final drainage scheme.
10. Subject to such a condition, the proposal would deliver appropriate surface water drainage measures and address flood risk. This would comply with Policy CS16 of the CS, the objectives of the Sustainable Drainage Solutions Supplementary Planning Document (2018) and the National Planning Policy Framework in so far as they relate to the treatment of surface water.

Other Matters

11. I have considered a number of matters which the appellants have raised in support of the appeal proposal. The current scheme is a revision to earlier proposals, omitting a swimming pool and tennis courts. However, as I have described, the amended scheme would have an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the site and area.
12. I note that prior approval has been granted to add an additional storey to the existing property. I recognise that this upwards extension would give rise to a dwelling which would be significantly higher than the existing property and slightly higher than the appeal proposal. However, it would have a much smaller footprint and therefore would be notably less bulky than the appeal proposal. As such, the extended property would appear less prominent than the appeal proposal.

13. Similarly, I note that a certificate of lawfulness has been approved for single storey side and rear extensions to the dwelling, along with a detached outbuilding in the rear garden. I acknowledge that the outbuilding would be a good size, but it would not appear overly prominent in the street scene due to its position away from the rear elevation of the main dwelling. The extensions would increase the footprint of the existing dwelling. However, given that they would be single storey and the chalet style roof would be retained, the extended property would be significantly less bulky than the appeal proposal and therefore less prominent.
14. Both fallback schemes would overall be smaller and less bulky than the appeal proposal. As such they would have less impact on the character and appearance of the site and area than the proposed dwelling. I have therefore attached limited weight to these fallback schemes in support of the proposal.
15. I accept that the existing dwelling has limited design merit, with the appellants describing it as 'outdated'. Whereas the proposed dwelling would provide an attractive modern home. However, I am satisfied that an alternative scheme, which would be proportionate to the original home and therefore less prominent within the rural area than the appeal proposal, could be secured at this site.
16. I recognise that there is a mixture of dwelling designs in the vicinity and that the proposal would add to this. I acknowledge that the nearest property, Yew Tree Cottage, sits closer to the highway than the proposed dwelling would. However, this is a pitched roof, red brick property which reflects the local vernacular. It therefore sits comfortably in its position addressing the highway and is well-integrated in the street scene.
17. I also note the appellants' comments regarding works which have been undertaken to Corbyn, on the opposite side of Soke Road. Whilst I viewed this site on my visit, I have limited information about this property and the works referred to. In any event, that site is viewed in the context of the adjacent commercial area.
18. The site circumstances of both Yew Tree Cottage and Corbyn are not directly comparable to the appeal scheme. Notwithstanding, each case must be considered on its own merits. I have therefore attached limited weight to these matters in support of allowing the appeal.

Conclusion

19. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations which outweigh this finding. For the reasons given, the appeal is dismissed.

Rebecca McAndrew

INSPECTOR