



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 September 2024

by B Astley-Serougi BA(Hons) LLM MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 January 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/24/3337127

9 Highmead Close, Reading, RG2 7NG

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by PNM Construction Ltd against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 230115
 - The development proposed is described as 'the erection of two blocks of two flats (4 flats in total) with associated parking and access'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published in December 2024. The parties have been provided with the opportunity to comment on the implications of the revisions to their cases. I have taken account of the revised Framework, and any comments made, in my determination of the appeal.

Background and Main Issues

3. The appellant provided amended plans with their appeal which shows that the unit mix of the proposed dwellings within Block B would be 2 x two bedroom units and 1 x one bedroom unit. The Council has had the chance to consider the amended plans and has confirmed that it no longer wishes to defend the third reason for refusal regarding the insufficient internal floor space and consequent substandard quality of accommodation. Consequently, I am satisfied that this matter has been resolved through amended plans. Therefore, the main issues are as follows:
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
 - The effect of the proposed development on wildlife and trees
 - The effect of the proposal development on highway safety and neighbour amenity.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. The appeal site is situated in an established residential area of Reading. Highmead Close is a cul-de-sac which is characterised by terraces consisting of two storey dwellings. The terraces are set back from the highway and consequently results in an open character. There is a high level of uniformity on the cul-de-sac given the uniform scale, materials and features of the dwellings despite the numerous alterations to nearby dwellings. At the turning head of the cul-de-sac are two triangular green spaces that result in open corners to Highmead Close. Consequently, these provide a high level of balance and symmetry to the cul-de-sac whilst also providing views of the East Reading Wooded Ridgeline Major Landscape feature (ERWR). Therefore, the appeal site contributes significantly to the pleasant and open character of Highmead Close.
5. The proposal would introduce two blocks of two flats into one of the green corner parcels of land. The blocks would be set back further from the highway when compared to the building line of the terraces that border the appeal site. Given the triangular layout of the plot, the addition of two blocks of flats would result in a sense of enclosure on the cul-de-sac. Moreover, the proposed development would result in the erosion of the gap between the existing terraces and obscure views of the ERWR. It would therefore result in the introduction of an incongruous development within the streetscape and consequently harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
6. The proposal would deliver relatively small gardens for the proposed flats when compared to the large plot sizes of the existing dwellings on Highmead Close which would further result in a development at odds with the prevailing character of the Close.
7. Additionally, the proposal would be dominated by a large area of hardstanding. Considering the verdant character of the close, the dominance of hardstanding in the appeal scheme would be an incongruous feature within the streetscene. Whilst there is some hardstanding at the frontages of a number of the terraces, it is interspersed with soft landscape features such as hedges and trees. Consequently, they disrupt and prevent a dominance of hardstanding in the cul-de-sac.
8. Planning permission was previously granted for a two-storey dwelling neighbouring 9 Highmead Close. I do not have the full details of this permission. Nevertheless, the previous permission was for a single 2 storey dwelling and as such is not wholly comparable to the proposed development before me.
9. In conclusion, the appeal scheme would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with Policies CC7, H10 and H11 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019. These policies seek to ensure, amongst other things, that developments including outdoor spaces, are designed to a high standard and enhance the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Wildlife and Trees

10. The ERWR is an area of mixed deciduous woodland and borders the appeal site. The ERWR is categorised as a 'Priority Habitat' as defined by the Framework and consequently is an identified area of biodiversity interest. It therefore forms part of the green network as outlined in Policy EN12 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.
11. The appeal scheme would provide compact gardens and would partly sit beneath the canopies of adjacent trees. This could restrict light and result in nuisance through falling branches and leaf drop. Whilst future occupants might prune overhanging branches, given the size of the trees it is also likely that considerable pressure would be placed upon the Council to prune the trees, which it might find hard to resist.
12. Insofar as the Council expressed concern in relation to the disturbance of wildlife the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal noted that 1m inside the western site boundary was a mammal hole that could potentially have been created by a badger as well as there being in close proximity another mammal hole with a recently created spoil heap. This was accompanied by a worn pathway from the appeal site to this area. Consequently, this is compelling evidence to suggest that the appeal scheme could affect badgers which are a protected species.
13. The appellant considers that a condition requiring mammal gaps as part of the landscape scheme as well as a survey is sufficient to address concerns regarding protected species. However, in the absence of a badger survey, I am unable to determine the full effect of the appeal on a protected species and consequently must take a precautionary approach. This is supported by paragraph 99 of Circular 06/05 – Biodiversity and Geological Conservation which states that the presence or otherwise of protected species should be established before the planning permission is granted.
14. The appellant has stated that they consider the appeal site to not constitute a semi-natural habitat and that the opportunity to provide biodiversity gain through planning controls would deliver a greater impact regarding wildlife and trees. However, even if this was the case, this would not ensure that protected species and the priority habitat of the ERWR would not be harmed by the proposal.
15. In conclusion, the appellant has failed to demonstrate that the appeal scheme would not result in harm to protected species and the priority habitat known as ERWR. Therefore, the proposed development conflicts with Policies EN12 and EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 insofar as they seek to ensure developments do not result in a net loss of biodiversity.

Highways Safety and Neighbour Amenity

16. The appeal site is located within Zone 3 Secondary Core Area as defined in the Revised Parking Standards and Design SPD 2011. Consequently, the parking requirement is 1.5 spaces for a 2 bedroom apartment and 2 spaces for a 3 bedroom dwelling. There is an existing high level of on street parking in the close.
17. The existing layout is a large area of hardstanding that is shared between 9 and 10 Highmead Close and provides 2 spaces for each of these dwellings. The

appeal scheme would provide 6 parking spaces. However, the access for the proposed dwellings would result in the parking provision for 9 and 10 Highmead Close being reduced to 1 space per dwelling. Consequently, this would result in the displacement of vehicles being parked on the highway. Given these dwellings are opposite the turning point on the Close, the vehicles could not be parked outside of 9 and 10 Highmead Close without limiting the space and visibility for vehicles, thus harming highway safety. Therefore, it would be likely that these vehicles would be displaced along Highmead Close and create further competition for parking spaces. This competition would harm the amenity of existing residents of Highmead Close and in particular the occupants of 9 and 10 Highmead Close.

18. In conclusion, the appeal scheme would result in harm to highway safety and neighbour amenity. Thus, it would conflict with Policy TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 insofar as they seek to ensure developments have appropriate parking facilities and do not have a detrimental effect upon the highway network.

Other Matters

19. The application was partly refused on the basis that the contributions towards affordable housing provision in accordance with Policies CC9 and H3 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 had not been secured. The appellant has submitted a Unilateral Undertaking during the appeal process but it is incomplete. Had I been minded to allow the appeal this would have been a matter requiring further attention. However, as I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons no further consideration is required.
20. The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal submitted with the original appeal documents refers to the Lodge Wood & Sandford Mill SSSI located approximately 5.2km from the appeal site as well as the Bramshill SSSI. The appeal site is located in the Impact Risk Zone of the latter. Had I been minded to allow the appeal this would have been a matter requiring further exploration. However, as I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons no further consideration is required.

Planning Balance

21. The appeal scheme would provide market housing for the area. Whilst this is a benefit of the appeal scheme it does not outweigh the harm I have identified above.

Conclusion

22. The proposal conflicts with the development plan and material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. I therefore conclude that for the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

B Astley-Serougi

INSPECTOR