



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 February 2025

by **O Marigold BSc DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7th March 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3352881

Garage Block next to 45 Ravensbourne Drive, Woodley, Wokingham RG5 4LJ

- 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 Dependable Properties Ltd against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 241638.
 - The development proposed is described as 'construction of a new accessible two-bedroom single storey dwelling, following the demolition of the existing redundant garages on the site'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Since the decision of the Council to refuse planning permission, a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been published. The main parties have had the opportunity to comment on this, and I have determined the appeal based on the current planning policy position.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area,
 - the effect of the proposal on parking and highway safety, and
 - whether the proposal would provide adequate living conditions for its future occupiers, with regard to outlook, privacy and outdoor space.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. The appeal site consists of garages and a forecourt area. It lies to the side of a two-storey block of current and former retail units, with flats above (45 to 51 Ravenscourt Drive). An electrical substation is located between the site and the road. The surrounding area is made up primarily of two-storey dwellings, many semi-detached, giving it a suburban and reasonably spacious character.
5. The proposal seeks to demolish the garages and to erect a single-storey, two-bedroom dwelling. It is intended to provide accessible accommodation for an individual who has severely reduced mobility, and who currently lives in a less accessible unit within the adjacent block. The proposal would have a

contemporary design with a flat, sedum roof. Its position would reflect that of the existing garages, have a low profile and would allow access to the adjacent flats.

6. However, the proposed building would be located very close to the side and rear edges of the site, where it adjoins properties in Haddon Drive. As such, its tight positioning would appear cramped compared to the more spacious layout of dwellings locally. Furthermore, its single-storey, flat roofed design would reflect the shape of the existing functional garage block, and be set well back into the site. In contrast, nearby buildings are predominantly two-storey and pitched roof in form, and have a broadly consistent building line that is much further forward. As a result, the proposal would appear contrived and harmfully out-of-place with its surroundings.
7. For the reasons given above, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with policies CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (WBCS), adopted January 2010, as well as the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), dated June 2012. These require proposals to maintain the high quality of the environment, and have an appropriate layout and design which contributes to the character of the area. It would also conflict with the similar requirements of the National Design Guide and Framework paragraphs 135 and 139. Accordingly, I give substantial negative weight to this harm.

Parking and Highway Safety

8. Policy CC07 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD), adopted February 2014, requires proposals to comply with its parking standards, in this case for one space on site, and to retain an appropriate level of off-street parking. The submitted plan shows that at least one parking space would be provided within the existing frontage courtyard, thus complying with the standard.
9. However, the proposal would result in the existing four garages being demolished. The appellant states that they are redundant, although I have little to substantiate this. Furthermore, there is no dispute that planning permission¹ for conversion of a ground floor retail unit (49 Ravenscourt Drive) to residential use shows two of the garage spaces as providing parking for that unit.
10. Moreover, Google Street View evidence shows the forecourt area being actively used by vehicles. Such use was confirmed on my visit, albeit this represents only a snapshot in time. Some or all of the vehicles using the existing parking areas may be associated with the intended occupiers of the proposal. Even so, it would still leave the future occupiers of the existing flat without parking.
11. As a result, the proposal would displace the off-street parking provision for existing properties. There are parking restrictions on sections of Ravenscourt Drive, and no detailed evidence of parking in the area, such as during evenings and weekends, is before me. Nor do I have clear evidence of the servicing arrangements for the retail unit, which may also utilise the forecourt. As such, the displaced parking caused by the proposal may well result in pressure on nearby streets, causing obstruction to the free flow of traffic, risking highway safety, and inconveniencing local residents and traders.

¹ LPA reference 182131

12. For the reasons given, the proposal would have a harmful effect on parking and highway safety. It would therefore conflict with MDD policy CC07 by failing to retain an appropriate level of off-street parking, as well as WBCS policy CP6 which requires parking arrangements which do not cause highway problems. I give this harm substantial negative weight, bearing in mind the safety requirements of Framework paragraphs 115 and 135.

Living Conditions

13. The appeal site currently provides pedestrian access to the first-floor flats in the adjacent block, by means of an external staircase. It also provides access to a rear area which serves some of the units within the block. There is no dispute that these shared access arrangements would continue post-development.
14. As such, occupiers of the existing flats would have direct views into the windows and the outside amenity space of the proposal, including from the communal staircase. The movements of people accessing the staircase or rear area would also be intrusive, as would the existing side windows of the adjacent block, which would overlook the proposed accommodation. For these reasons, future occupiers of the proposal would have very little privacy, both internally and in respect of their outdoor amenity space.
15. In addition, the proposal and its bedrooms would be heavily constrained and hemmed-in by the close proximity of the site boundaries, including the trees and fences of properties in Haddon Drive. The main outlook from the front windows of the proposal would look directly onto the shared parking and bin storage area, which would not be particularly appealing. For these reasons, future occupiers would have a poor quality of outlook.
16. Alternative public open space is available at nearby Woodford Park. However, this would not provide the useable private space required by the SPD, for example for clothes drying and outside storage. The internal space of the proposed accommodation would slightly exceed the amount required by the Nationally Described Space Standards. Even so, this would not compensate for its shortcomings as set out above.
17. For the reasons identified, the proposal would not provide adequate living conditions for its future occupiers, with regard to outlook, privacy and outdoor space. As such, it would conflict with WBCS policies CP1 and CP3, as well as the SPD. These require development to be functional and to have a layout that would not cause detriment to the quality of life of occupiers. Accordingly, and given the aim of Framework paragraph 135 for a high standard of amenity, I give this conflict substantial negative weight.

Other Considerations

18. The Council accepts that it cannot currently demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land, with only 1.7 years' worth of supply following publication of the new Framework. In light of this very substantial shortfall, it is necessary for me to determine whether the adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits inherent in providing additional accommodation, to assist in addressing the undersupply. This is as set out in Framework paragraph 11.

19. I have found conflict with WBCS policies CP1, CP3 and CP6, and MDD policy CC07, which are consistent with the Framework. Against that, the proposal would make an addition to the supply of housing, in a location close to services and facilities. It would make efficient use of land and have small ecological benefits. Its future occupiers, and those of the accommodation released by the proposal, would make economic and social contributions. Construction of the proposal would assist the building industry.
20. That said, only one unit is proposed, albeit that this would be particularly beneficial to the potential future occupier, given their limited mobility. These benefits therefore attract moderate weight in favour of the proposal. Framework paragraph 125 gives substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes. It also promotes the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially to meet identified needs for housing. However, in light of my findings above, the extent of harm outweighs these benefits.
21. In reaching my decision, I have had due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in the Equality Act 2010, including the protected characteristic of disability. Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 requires that decisions ensure respect for private and family life and the home. I have kept these interests at the forefront of my mind, but they are qualified rights, and interference may be justified where in the public interest.
22. Dismissal of the appeal may well result in a continuation of the current living arrangements, adversely affecting an individual with a protected characteristic. I have had due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity, and the benefits to the individual. However, I conclude that the adverse impacts of the proposal, which would be permanent, mean that dismissal would be necessary and proportionate in the public interest.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

23. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications for planning permission, and therefore appeals, must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Given the harm identified, the adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework read in the round.
24. The proposal would conflict with the Development Plan, read as a whole. The material considerations in this case, including the Framework, do not indicate a decision other than in accordance with the Development Plan. This leads me to conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

O Marigold

INSPECTOR