



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 March 2025

by **Mr C J Tivey BSc (Hons) BPI MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7 April 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/D/24/3357854

62 Long Lane, Tilehurst, Reading RG31 6YJ

- 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 Mrs Mandy Neate against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/01868/HOUSE.
 - The development proposed is for the erection of metal railings and gate adjacent a highway and the erection of 6m x 6m wooden detached flat roof double garage outbuilding at front garden.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. At the time of my site visit the railings and gates had been installed and the garage appeared largely constructed in accordance with the submitted drawings.
3. Since the planning application the subject of this appeal was determined, a new version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') has been published (12 December 2024) and consequently amended on 7 February 2025. There has been no material change to National planning policy in respect of householder appeals and therefore I consider that it was not necessary to refer back to the parties. I have determined the appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the appeal proposal upon the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site is situated within a residential street which comprises a mix of dwelling types; front boundary treatments predominantly consist of low walls, fencing and hedges, as opposed to railings. I note from the aerial imagery of 2022 that the site originally had a soft landscaped frontage including a front boundary hedgerow adjacent to the preserved Oak tree which, like many other properties within Long Lane, gave it a verdant character.
6. Due to the slope of the land up from the highway, the garage is in an elevated position set upon a levelled aggregate base which is contained to the roadside by a timber sleeper retaining wall structure.

7. The railings and gates situated close to the back edge of the public footway, along with the large contemporary garage appear stark and visually prominent within the street scene which fail to integrate successfully into the local area by virtue of their design, size, materials and forward positioning which run counter to the advice set out within the 'Quality Design' and 'House Extensions' supplementary planning document and guidance respectively.
8. I acknowledge that section 1.8 of the Quality Design SPD states that where buildings are set back, a separate boundary is also provided, often in the form of a low wall, railings or shrub planting (paragraph 1.8.1). The SPD goes on to say that boundary treatments play an important role in shaping the character of an area and contributing to the street scene, and should respect and reflect their surroundings, having regard to the existing prevailing forms of boundary treatment. The SPD does state that fast growing and non-native species should be avoided to ensure that hedgerows do not become over-dominant and to ensure that natural surveillance onto the street is not interrupted.
9. However, I consider that the previous conifer hedge was not unduly over-dominant within the street by virtue of its limited height, reflecting the site's surroundings. With respect, the railings that have been erected cannot be deemed of a low stature and with the presence of the large garage within the frontage, natural surveillance would in any case continue to be hindered, notwithstanding that the erected railings and gates in themselves are visually permeable.
10. Further, whilst the railings and gates may be of a high quality, they do not respect or reflect their surroundings having regard to the existing prevailing forms of boundary treatment, contrary to the SPD (para. 1.8.2). Therefore, I cannot agree that the railings and gates integrate seamlessly into the street scene. In coming to this opinion I have had regard to the masonry wall which forms the boundary with the highway at 54 Long Lane although ultimately each case must be assessed on its own merits.
11. Turning back to the outbuilding, the House Extensions SPG stipulates that garages should normally be located to the side or rear of dwellings, be set back from the highway to allow access or parking between the garage and the pavement and that where they project forward of the main entrance to a house, care should be taken to ensure that they do not dominate the main elevation. Consequently, I agree that the SPG does allow for flexibility in the position of garages and does not expressly preclude those which sit forward of a host dwelling. I do however consider that that the garage dominates the main elevation of the house.
12. I acknowledge that the appeal dwelling does not form a well-defined or uniform building line with its neighbours and there is some variation in the distance of these properties from the highway; nonetheless, garages within frontages do not constitute the 'norm' within the immediate locality and a variation in the distance of principal elevations to the highway does not automatically render a scheme such as the appeal proposal as acceptable. As I have found above, the proposed garage is located in an elevated position, it is of a substantial scale and by virtue of its lightly painted vertical boarding (notwithstanding it being of a similar shade to that of the newly rendered host dwelling), it appears as an overly engineered solution that runs counter to the verdant character of Long Lane and which, until recently, was contributed to by the appeal site itself. The garage is far closer to the highway than any of the dwellings located along Long Lane and notwithstanding that the appeal

dwelling and its neighbours exhibit different designs. I cannot agree that it appears as an uncontroversial continuation of the existing irregular pattern of development.

13. On this matter I have noted reference to garages that have been provided at 39 and 40 Long Lane, but I have not been provided with the details of those developments and again each case must be assessed on its own merits.
14. It may well be that the proposal is largely obscured in long range views from the north and south, however in closer range views I can only find that by virtue of its design, size and materials, along with siting in a prominent position, that the scheme gives rise to an incongruent addition to the street scene which is visually unacceptable in townscape terms. I say this notwithstanding that I consider that the living conditions of the occupants of neighbouring residential properties would not be unduly harmed by the scheme.
15. I therefore find that the proposal has a harmful effect upon the character and appearance of the area and as well as being contrary to both the SPD and SPG, I also find conflict between the scheme and Policy CS14 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Development Plan Document adopted July 2012 which requires new development to demonstrate high quality design that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area, requiring it to contribute positively to local distinctiveness and sense of place. I also find it contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework which requires developments to, amongst other things, be visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping.

Conclusion

16. Having regard to the above and all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal be dismissed.

C J Tivey

INSPECTOR