



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 April 2025

by **K Townend BSc MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 May 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/W/25/3358575 **262 Southcote Lane, Reading RG30 3BB**

- 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 Mr Azad Asghar against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
- The application Ref is PL/24/0579.
- The development proposed is a separate end 2 bedroom end terrace house.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development provided in the banner heading above is taken from the application form. The Council described the proposal as a 2 bedroom end terrace house. However, the appeal before me is for a detached, two-bedroom, dwelling rather than a new end terrace house and I have considered the appeal on the basis of the plans and information before me.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area;
 - whether the proposed development would provide acceptable living conditions for the future occupants of the proposed dwelling, with particular regard to internal and external space;
 - the effect of the proposal on highway safety;
 - whether there is a suitable mechanism to secure affordable housing; and
 - The effect of the proposal on existing landscaping.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site lies in a residential area of Reading on a street of terraced and semi-detached houses. It is a gap between existing buildings formed by being at the end of the terrace houses on Southcote Lane and behind the houses on Virginia Way. The gap is not unusual nor distinct in the street scene or wider area, and I saw other gaps between buildings, not just on corners.

5. However, the appeal site is not a prominent plot. It is clearly visible as a gap between buildings but has some built development on it. It is also not prominent in views travelling along Southcote Lane due to the existing boundary hedges and buildings on and around the site. The gap is visible but is not important for the character of the area.
6. The appeal proposal includes the removal of the existing detached garage and the single-storey extension at the side of the host property and the construction of a detached dwelling. In my judgement, the design, scale and massing of the proposed dwelling, through the use of similar materials, not being significantly different in height, the roof profile and shape, and the detailing of the design of the front elevation matching the host dwelling, would successfully integrate with the surrounding development, even though there are no other detached houses in the area. Albeit a detached dwelling it is not significantly larger or out of keeping with the existing houses.
7. Nevertheless, the design and shape of the outdoor area would not respect the size and character of other gardens in the area. Paragraph 4.4.82 of the supporting text to Policy H10 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted 2019 (the LP) advises that, in complying with policies on design, developments will have to respect spacing and openness where this forms part of the character of an area. The size and shape of the rear gardens, although not readily viewed from public areas, and the spacing between the groups of houses currently forms part of the character of the area. The appeal proposal would be out of keeping with this context.
8. The proposed dwelling would retain a gap to the side, behind the houses on Virginia Way and a narrower gap to the host dwelling. It would be detached but would not be substantially separate from the host dwelling and, due to following the building line of the houses on Southcote Lane, would still provide a visual break between the houses on the two roads. It would, therefore, not be cramped when viewed from the road frontage. It would also, due to the gap retained between the proposed dwelling and the rear gardens of the houses on Virginia Way, not be overbearing to the occupants of those properties. However, this would not overcome the harm that would result from the size and shape of the garden being out of context with the urban grain.
9. For the above reasons, although I find that the design and scale of the proposed dwelling would not be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, the size and shape of the proposed garden would be out of keeping with, and adversely affect the character and appearance of the area. The development would, therefore, conflict with the requirements of Policies CC7, H10 and H11 of the LP which, taken together, seek to ensure that all development is of a high design quality, maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area in which it is located, including, but not exclusively, relating to urban structure and grain, ensure that the development makes a positive contribution to character, responds positively to the local context and creates or reinforces local character and distinctiveness, and requires development in gardens to make a positive contribution to the character of the area in terms of, amongst other matters, the relationship of the existing built form and spaces around buildings within the surrounding area, provide a layout which integrates with the surrounding area with regard to built-up coverage of each plot, and that the design of outdoor areas respects the size and character of other similar spaces in the vicinity.

Living conditions

10. Policy H5 of the LP requires all new build housing to comply with the Technical Housing Standards - Nationally Described Space Standard (the NDSS). The Council's evidence advises that the proposed dwelling would measure 53.19sqm which, therefore, falls below the requirement in the NDSS of 70sqm. Moreover, although the Council initially accepted that the bedrooms met the size requirements in the NDSS, the evidence now indicates that the second bedroom is only 5.69sqm.
11. The appellant has agreed with the Council's figures and, consequently, the development would not achieve the requirements of the NDSS and would be contrary to Policy H5 of the LP. Even in the context of a national need for more housing the NDSS seeks to ensure that the housing provided is of an appropriate size. A shortfall below the NDSS indicates that the development would result in poor internal living conditions for the future occupants of the property.
12. The proposal includes a garden area of 76sqm to the rear and side of the proposed dwelling. This would be greater than the gross floor area of the proposed dwelling, measured externally, as is advised in the supporting text of Policy H10 of the LP. The area to the side of the dwelling would not be the most appropriate location for sitting out or children's play, due to being between the side wall of the house and the fence boundary.
13. Nevertheless, this area would be capable of providing space for home food production, green waste composting, refuse, cycle and general storage or drying space. The area to the rear of the dwelling would be sufficient to provide an area for the future residents to sit out, children to play, and for landscaping. Overall, albeit split into two sections the garden is of sufficient size for the size of the dwelling and that it is fragmented is not sufficient justification for refusal.
14. For the above reasons, the proposal would provide sufficient external space. Nevertheless, the development would not provide acceptable living conditions for the future occupants of the proposed dwelling, with particular regard to internal space. It would, therefore, fail to comply with the requirements of Policy H5 of the LP which requires all new build housing to comply with the Nationally Described Space Standard.

Highway safety

15. The appeal site comprises part of the side garden and the site of the existing detached garage and single storey extension. Parking is currently provided to the front of the garage and also in front of the existing dwelling and I saw at my visit that this space could accommodate several cars. This is all accessed off an existing dropped kerb.
16. The site is within Zone 3, Secondary Core Area, as indicated in the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Revised Parking Standards and Design Supplementary Planning Document, adopted 2011 (the Parking SPD). This document advises, that in Zone 3, new two-bedroom dwellings should be provided with 1.5 parking spaces, which the Council has then rounded up to two. This would need to be in addition to retaining two parking spaces for the existing three-bedroom dwelling. The submitted plans indicate one car parking space for the

proposed dwelling which would, therefore, fall below the requirement of the Parking SPD.

17. Notwithstanding the Council's reason for refusal, I have no compelling evidence that the existing access is substandard. The access already provides for parking at the front of the dwelling. Although it is close to the roundabout at the end of Southcote Lane this is a roundabout within a residential area and within a 20 mph zone. The telegraph pole near to the access is set at the back of the pavement and would not significantly affect visibility. The pedestrian refuge, in the middle of the road, is also an existing feature. Vehicles already reverse onto or off the drive as they do on other drives across the estate.
18. Nevertheless, although the existing driveway can accommodate several cars, a car parked in front of the proposed new dwelling would block access to the parking area shown for the existing dwelling. Given the proximity of the pedestrian refuge in the centre of the highway, outside the site, it is not clear that the existing dropped kerb could be extended sufficiently to enable access to the parking for the existing dwelling.
19. That the new dwelling would block access to the parking area for the existing dwelling would, therefore, increase the risk of on-street parking. Although I noted that there was no particular pressure for on-street parking on Southcote Lane, which corresponds with the parking survey evidence provided by the appellant, parking immediately outside the existing dwelling would not be acceptable due to the crossing point and the nearby bus stop.
20. For the above reasons, I find that the development would have an unacceptable adverse effect on highway safety due to the lack of on-site parking for the proposed and existing dwelling. The development would, therefore, fail to comply with Policies TR1, TR3 and TR5 of the LP. Collectively these policies seek to ensure that all development makes appropriate provision for works and ensures an adequate level of accessibility and safety, considers the effect on safety, congestion and the environment, provides access to the highway to comply with the adopted standards, ensures that the development would not have a material detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network, would not be detrimental to the safety of the users of the network, and would provide car parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of the location.

Affordable housing

21. Policy H3 of the LP seeks to secure appropriate contributions towards affordable housing on all housing development. On sites of one to four dwellings Policy H3 requires a financial contribution to be made that would enable the equivalent of 10% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough.
22. The LP was adopted in 2019, after the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) relating to the scale of development for which affordable housing contributions are required. Policy H3 was justified on the basis of the affordable housing need in Reading, and I have no compelling evidence that Policy H3 of the LP should not be given full weight.
23. Although the appellant has suggested that a financial contribution would be made, equivalent to 10% of the housing to be provided, as required by Policy H3, I have

not been provided with a completed and signed copy of a Unilateral Undertaking. Therefore, I have no appropriate means to secure a contribution towards affordable housing. For these reasons, the proposal fails to comply with Policies H3 and CC9 of the LP which require residential development to make an appropriate contribution towards affordable housing and secure infrastructure through direct provision or financial contributions.

Landscaping

24. The appeal site is mainly laid to hard standing or existing buildings. There is existing landscaping to the front of the site, between the drive and the rear of the neighbouring property, and well-established hedges along the frontage on Southcote Lane. Policy EN12 of the LP seeks to ensure that new development demonstrates how the location and type of landscaping within a scheme has been arranged such that it maintains or links into the existing Green Network and contributes to its consolidation.
25. At the time of my visit, the hedge between the appeal site and the neighbours was not as extensive as that shown in the photograph from the Council Natural Environment Officer. Moreover, the larger part of this existing landscaping lies within the garden of the neighbouring property, not within the appeal site. The hedge had already been cut back and, even if the low-walled garden area would be removed, I have no compelling evidence that the hedge would not be capable of being retained.
26. As it is on the boundary of the appeal site and in the area of the gap retained between the proposal and the neighbouring property, I have no reason to believe that this landscaping would not be retained, as required by Policy EN12, even though it is not shown as such on the proposed plans. Contrary to the Council's assertions, the retention of this landscaping could be controlled through an appropriately worded condition.
27. For the above reasons, I find that the development would not adversely affect existing landscaping and would, therefore, comply with policies EN12 and EN14 of the LP. These policies, taken together, seek to maintain, protect, consolidate, extend, and enhance the identified Green Network, protect and wherever possible enhance features on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable, protect existing trees and hedges, and make provision for tree retention and planting.

Conclusion

28. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

K Townend

INSPECTOR