



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 April 2018

by Robert Fallon B.Sc. (Hons) PGDipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20th June 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/17/3187404

489-491 Reading Road, Winnersh, RG41 5HL

- 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 Richard Keeley (Edwardson Homes Ltd) against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 171082, dated 9 April 2017, was refused by notice dated 4 August 2017.
 - **The development proposed is described on the application form as "Demolition of 491 and 489 Reading Road and the erection of an 8 dwelling block of flats, including revised landscaping and parking".**
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

2. **Within the context of the Council's reasons for refusal and the evidence in this case, the main issues are the effect of the development on:**
 - the character and appearance of the area;
 - living conditions, with specific regard to whether the scheme would be overbearing and compromise the visual outlook from Nos 487 and 493 Reading Road.

Reasons

Appeal site context

3. Reading Road is a busy distributor road and predominantly residential in character. It contains a diverse range of properties, which vary in design, scale and maturity.
4. Although there is no consistent architectural style, I noted from my site visit that the north-eastern side of Reading Road in the vicinity of the appeal site is mostly characterised by bungalows (many with accommodation in the roof) and occasional 2-storey dwellings, whilst the south-western side is typified by 2-storey housing with fewer bungalows and a limited number of 2.5/3 storey apartment blocks. In general, development on both sides of the road is set well back from the road, with front boundaries defined by fences, walls and hedges.

Character and appearance

5. Although the development would be of a broadly similar height to the properties at Nos 487 and 493 Reading Road, it would extend almost the entire width of the plot and be of a much greater mass and bulk. The substantial scale of the building would be accentuated by its high wall-plate and eaves, considerable crown roof, nondescript flank elevations and 2 front projecting half-hipped gables. It would in my view be highly prominent and dominate this part of the road, to the detriment of the character and appearance of the area.
6. I recognise that the appellant has sought to minimise **the development's** visual impact by reducing external ground levels. However, to my mind, this would give the building an unusual compressed appearance and convey the impression, when considered collectively with its scale and mass, that it had been squeezed onto the site. This harm would be further compounded by the site frontage being almost entirely given over to hardstanding for 8 parking bays, with very limited space available for soft landscaping to filter views of the development.
7. The development and its relationship with neighbouring dwellings would also be publicly visible when approaching from both directions on Reading Road, which would intensify its harmful impact.
8. I note the **appellant's reference to other front gardens not being screened by** soft landscaping, but this does not justify the harm identified above. In any event, I must consider the scheme on its own merits. I also acknowledge the **appellant's reference to the development** complying with the separation **standards in the Council's Design Guide**¹. However, these are a minimum standard and will not always be appropriate, as is the case in the current appeal.
9. In view of the above, I conclude that the development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy² and Policies CC03 and TB06 of the Local Plan³ which collectively seek, amongst other things, to ensure that new development is of a high quality design that integrates with the surrounding area and provides new opportunities for green infrastructure.
10. Despite the Council having referred to Policies TB21 and CC10 of the Local Plan in its reason for refusal, no information has been forthcoming as to how the **scheme does not address the Council's Landscape Character Assessment or** how surface water cannot be managed in a sustainable manner. I am as a consequence satisfied that the scheme is not in conflict with these policies.
11. I also find that the scheme conflicts with urban design principles R1, R2, R10 **and R11 of the Council's Design Guide and Paragraphs 56, 60, 61 and 64 of the Framework**⁴ which cumulatively seek, amongst other things, high quality design, a development density that equates to appropriate bulk and mass, and the successful integration of development into its surrounding built environment.

¹ Borough Design Guide, Supplementary Planning Document, June 2012, Wokingham Borough Council

² Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework, Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document, January 2010, Wokingham Borough Council

³ Wokingham Borough Development Plan, Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan, February 2014, Wokingham Borough Council

⁴ National Planning Policy Framework, Communities and Local Government, March 2012.

Living conditions

12. Although the proposed development would be in close proximity to the neighbouring properties at Nos 487 and 493 Reading Road, it would step in from the boundary where it projects beyond the rear elevation of No 493 and not cut across the 45 degree line from its patio doors. The appellant also states that the scheme would be set more than 2 metres inside the boundary at this point **and therefore comply with the Council's Design Guide.**
13. However, whilst I am satisfied that the outlook from inside No 493 would not be affected, it is my view that the development would, by reason of its height, bulk and scale, dominate the outlook from its rear patio area and appear overly oppressive. I recognise that the hipped roof design would alleviate some of this impact and that the patio area is partly screened by an existing fence and vegetation, but the development would still be visible beyond this.
14. Although I am satisfied that the scheme would not harm the outlook from No **487's** side elevation dormer window, rear elevation windows and private garden, I do have concerns that it would appear oppressive when viewed from the side elevation windows to its rear extension currently under construction. Nevertheless, because it is not clear to me whether the rooms connected to these windows would be used for retail purposes in connection with the shop or a residential use, I am unable to make a conclusive determination as to whether the proposal would harm the living conditions of the occupants of No 487. However, in view of my conclusions on other issues, it is not necessary for me to reach a definitive view on this matter.
15. In view of the above, I conclude that the development would be harmful to the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers at No 493 Reading Road. The proposal would therefore conflict with Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy, which seeks, amongst other things, to ensure that development does not adversely affect the amenities of adjoining land users and their quality of life.
16. I also find that the scheme conflicts with the underlying objective of the **Council's Design Guide and Paragraph 17 (bullet point 4) of the Framework**, which cumulatively seek, amongst other things, to ensure that planning seeks to secure a good standard of amenity for neighbouring occupiers.

Other matters

17. I recognise that the appellant has sought to address the Inspector's concerns in respect of the previous scheme by reducing the proposed apartment block in scale, footprint and height. However, whilst I have given consideration to this decision, it does not automatically follow that a revised development would be acceptable and in any event, I must consider the scheme on its own merits.
18. Given my conclusion on the main issues that the development is unacceptable, the other matters raised by the neighbouring occupier have not been central to my decision. Accordingly, there is no need for me to consider them further as it would not alter the outcome of the appeal.

Planning balance

19. The appellant states that the appeal site does not contain a listed building and is not situated within a conservation area. However, in reaching my decision, I have given significant weight to Paragraph 17 (4th bullet point) which

emphasizes the need for high quality design and Paragraph 64 which states that poorly designed development which fails to take the opportunity to improve the character and quality of an area should be refused.

20. **The appellant states that the Council's housing land supply policies fail to meet** the objectives of Paragraph 47 of the Framework insofar as the data relating to objectively assessed housing need in the Core Strategy is out of date. As a consequence, the appellant states that the presumption in favour of sustainable development as outlined in Paragraph 14 of the Framework applies, and has also referred to an appeal decision from March 2017 where the Inspector concluded that the Council could not demonstrate an up-to-date 5 year housing land supply. Although the Council asserts that it does have a 5-year housing land supply and that its policies are up to date, no information has been supplied to demonstrate this, or that this position has been based upon an appropriate evidence base of objectively assessed housing need.
21. I am as a consequence unable to conclude that the Council's **objectively** assessed housing need figures are up to date and that it has a 5-year housing land supply. However, even if its housing policies are out-of-date and the presumption in favour of sustainable development is engaged, I am satisfied that the adverse environmental impacts of the development referred to above would significantly and demonstrably outweigh its social and economic benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework, namely the provision of 8 new dwellings, increased opportunity for home ownership in a sustainable location (particularly first time buyers), making an efficient use of land, reducing the pressure for housing on more sensitive sites, local employment during construction, greater subsequent expenditure in the local area and assistance in sustaining key services.
22. The appellant also states that the payment of New Homes Bonus and the community infrastructure levy would constitute a benefit in favour of the development. However, I have given limited weight to these potential payments as Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) outlines that a local planning authority must only have regard to a local finance consideration insofar as it is material. Section 70(4) of the 1990 Act (as amended) defines a local finance consideration as a grant or other financial assistance that has been, that will or that could be provided to a relevant authority by a Minister of the Crown (such as New Homes Bonus payments), or sums that a relevant authority has received, or will or could receive, in payment of the Community Infrastructure Levy. In this particular instance, the financial payments referred to by the appellant are not considered to be material to the decision as I have no evidence that they would be used to make the development acceptable in planning terms or mitigate its impact.

Conclusion

23. I have found that the appeal proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. All representations have been taken into account, but no matters, including the benefits of the development and the scope of possible planning conditions, have been found to outweigh the identified harm and policy conflict. For the reasons above, the appeal should be dismissed.

Robert Fallon

INSPECTOR