



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 April 2019

by **Martin Andrews MA(Planning) BSc(Econ) DipTP & DipTP(Dist) MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30th May 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/19/3221229

Workshop at Land to the rear of 20 & 22 Station Road, Twyford RG10 9NT

- 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 Ray Cook against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application, Ref. 181852, dated 27 June 2018, was refused by notice dated 8 August 2018.
 - The development proposed is demolition of the existing workshop and construction of a new 1-bed dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The Council's appeal statement explains that following the submission of revised plans after the lodging of the appeal, in particular Drawing No. PL 008 Rev. C, three of the five original reasons for refusal no longer apply. However, the Council's objection remains in respect of reasons 1) and 2) of the Refusal Notice and these are reflected in the main issues below.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are (i) the effect of the proposal on the character or appearance of the Twyford Railway Conservation Area, and (ii) the adequacy of the private amenity space for occupiers of the proposed dwelling.

Reasons

4. Turning firstly to issue (ii), the Council has argued that the external amenity area fails on a number of matters when assessed against the Borough Design Guide. This guidance will no doubt inform development on larger sites, particularly (albeit not exclusively) greenfield sites where densities can be adjusted to secure an appropriate balance between a range of competing factors for the available land.
 5. However, I consider that in the case of a small, heavily constrained, brownfield site such as this, a reasonable compliance with the more basic assessment on page 48 of the Design Guide is all that is necessary. As the appellant's statement correctly observes, the proposed dwelling is a one bedroom property
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and would be occupied by no more than two people, quite possibly a couple seeking ready access to the train station for commuting.

6. The proposed courtyard is roughly rectangular in shape; it provides cycle storage facilities and I consider it both provides an adequate sitting out area with the potential for sunlight and some outdoor storage space, these being the most relevant considerations for any likely prospective occupiers. And the fundamental point is that such occupiers will only choose to live there if in their opinion the courtyard is adequate for their needs. I therefore see no harmful conflict with Policies CP1 & CP3 of the Wokingham Borough LDF Core Strategy 2010; the Borough Design Guide, and paragraph 127f) of the updated National Planning Policy Framework 2019 ('the Framework').
7. Returning to the first issue, the Council says in paragraph 3.10 of its Appeal Statement that it '*acknowledges that the use of contemporary design within historic contexts is a worldwide common practice with many positive examples*'. However, it then proceeds to argue that the introduction of a contemporary, flat roofed detached building would have a standalone appearance at odds with the uniformity and strong design coherence of the late C19th red brick two storey terraces. This assessment is subsequently augmented by a number of detailed points as to why the development would be harmful.
8. It seems to me that the Council's criticism of the proposal is in this case so comprehensive that it is tantamount to a rejection of its earlier acknowledgement that contemporary and traditional design can harmoniously co-exist. This is illustrated by the conclusion in paragraph 3.14 of the Statement that, rather than providing a positive contrast in the Conservation Area, the main elements '*would compete for visual attention, diminishing the importance and visual hierarchy of the Brook Street terraces*'.
9. However, in my view this conclusion fails to give appropriate weight to the existing negative contrast of the site and its surroundings with the wider conservation area. Whilst to the south west of the appeal site there is the attractive terraced housing, the site itself is a dilapidated existing workshop and is positioned within the more open area between the terraces and the junction with Station Road. With its hotchpotch of rear elevations, outbuildings, garages and parking areas this area joins the workshop in harmfully compromising the quality of the townscape.
10. Whilst I acknowledge that the sharp contrast between a dwelling of overtly contemporary design and the Victorian terraces of Brook Street will inevitably draw the eye, the appeal scheme will provide a building and curtilage with a high quality design and layout of appropriate scale in a highly accessible and sustainable location. It would be far better than a pastiche of the existing nearby buildings. Furthermore, the benefit of an extra dwelling on this windfall site with its highly sustainable location is in my view a given and I see no need for discussion as to housing need and land availability in order to justify it. Moreover, the grounds of appeal quote extensively from the Framework and these extracts also provide a wide ranging basis of support for the principle of the proposal.
11. With all that said, there are in my view two drawbacks to the proposal that must be afforded considerable weight if the building, which will draw the eye

because of its marked contrast, is to be perceived positively rather than negatively. Both of these relate to the first floor addition, which because it would be the only two storey element in the gap between the rear of 20 & 22 Station Road and the flank of No. 49 Brook Street, would be of particular visual significance.

12. The proposed timber and glazed first floor was *'selected purposefully to respond to the traditional choice of red brick and offer a distinct contrast with the surrounding properties'*. However, whilst a contrast in materials is needed to support the contemporary design, I query whether timber cladding is appropriate to this urban setting and within this particular conservation area.
13. As regards the setting, I regard the prominent use of timber on a building to be more in keeping in either a well treed suburban or a rural area where it would relate both symbiotically and positively to its sylvan context. In terms of the conservation area, the authenticity of the contemporary architecture would be endorsed by the use of a material that resonates with the fact that (as stated in paragraph 3.6 of the Council's Statement) *'this part of Twyford was developed in response to the introduction of the railway to the area, and the terrace cottages and shops built over a relatively short period, providing accommodation and facilities for workers associated with the GWR mainline'*.
14. Alternatively, or in addition, the much greater glazing of the building than proposed would be neutral in relation to the character of the conservation area but would provide an opportunity to positively 'refresh' it. Glass is perceived as being more 'lightweight' and would offset the potential for the solidity and bulk of the building's rectilinear form, particularly the flat roof, to read uncomfortably against the attractive Victorian terraces. The fact that it would literally reflect at least some of these buildings would also be an enhancement of the road. However, irrespective of these possible alternatives, the essential point in this appeal is that I do not consider the proposed timber cladding of a building of this design would either be a positive feature in the street scene or serve to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area.
15. The second drawback is the infringement the adjoining terrace's building line through the half metre projection of the first floor in front of the flank of No. 49. I agree with the Council's argument on this point, and whilst I accept that the projection is in itself modest, it would have a disproportionately jarring effect – particularly in views when approaching the site from the junction with Station Road.
16. Ideally there needs to be a metre set back, although bearing in mind this may preclude development because of the need to acquire third party land I consider that a lining-in with the frontage of the terrace could be acceptable. In my view this would still be achievable despite the small size of the site. For example, if the bedroom and bathroom were to be on the first floor this would enable the open plan living room / kitchen area to be accommodated at ground floor level with the same living space as at present. There would be some loss of natural light and aspect but this would be balanced by an improved and more practicable relationship with the courtyard.
17. Whether or not such alternatives are both feasible and acceptable to the parties in this appeal, I conclude on issue (i) that despite supporting the principle of a

contemporary development on the site, in its present form the proposal would have a harmful effect on the street scene and would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area. This would be in harmful conflict with Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy ; Policy TB24 of the Wokingham Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014; the Borough Design Guide, and Government policy in the Framework - in particular Section 16: 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment'.

18. Pursuant to my conclusion on the effect on the conservation area, because the development is on only one site the harm caused to this designated heritage asset would be '*less than substantial*' as referred to in the Framework. I have carried out the balancing exercise required by paragraph 196 and have already made clear that I regard the addition of a dwelling on this site as a public benefit. However, this would not outweigh the harm caused, not least because, as I have indicated, I consider that there is the potential for an alternative option that would enable the development without the harm resulting from the current scheme.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons explained and having had regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Martin Andrews

INSPECTOR