

**BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 5 FEBRUARY 2020**

Ward: Redlands

Appeal No: APP/E0345/W/19/3229604

Planning Ref: 190250

Site: 25 Redlands Road, Reading, RG1 5HX

Proposal: Change of use from C3 use (residential dwellinghouse) to sui generis use (as a 'larger' HMO), infilling of undercroft, single storey extension to rear following demolition of existing rear single storey extension and conversion of garage to one-bedroom flat

Decision level: delegated decision on 10/04/2019

Method: Written representations

Decision: Appeal Allowed

Date Determined: 23 January 2020

Inspector: Site visit made on 13 August 2019 by Alex O'Doherty LLB(Hons) MSc

Decision by R C Kirby BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The existing property is a large detached early 20th Century house with on-site parking at the front, accessed off Redlands Road with garden wrapped round the east side of the house alongside Elmhurst Road and extending to the rear. The house is an attractive feature on the junction and contributes positively to the character and appearance of the Redlands Conservation Area.

1.2 The site has been the subject of an earlier planning permission in August 2018 (ref: 180144) for refurbishment to facilitate change of use from a single dwelling house with detached garage to 4 no. self-contained flats and studio (C3a) with associated car parking. This application was determined by Planning Applications Committee.

1.3 The application for conversion to HMO use was refused planning permission for the following reason:

The proposal would unduly dilute and harm the mixed and sustainable community and would have a detrimental impact on the physical character of the area, and as such does not comply with the Residential Conversions SPD (2013), Policy CS18 of the Core Strategy 2008 (altered 2015) and Policy DM8 of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document 2012 (altered 2015).

2. SUMMARY OF DECISION

2.1 The Inspectorate considered that the main issue in the appeal was:

- the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regards to its effect on the balance of housing types in the area.

2.2 The Inspector accepted that the proposed use of the appeal site as an HMO would exceed the threshold established in Local Plan Policy H8, as well as the guidance contained within the SPD. The Inspector noted that the wording of Policy H8 allows for an element of discretion in granting planning permission where the threshold set out in Policy H8 has or would be breached and took into account that "the Council has previously found that the loss of a single family dwelling in this location was acceptable when it granted planning permission for the conversion of the property to 4 self-

contained flats plus a studio flat on the site in August 2018". So in terms of the policy intent of seeking to avoid a significant loss of family homes in an area and preventing development that would have a harmful impact on the character of the area as a result of unduly diluting mixed and sustainable communities the Inspectorate concluded that by granting planning permission for the self-contained flats "it appears that the Council was satisfied that the development would not conflict with the SPD aims set out above".

2.3 However, the Inspector missed the point that the flat conversion included a 2 bedroom flat on the ground floor with access to the garden, which went a long way to meeting the policy intent.

2.4 The Inspector concluded that while the proposal would result in a concentration of HMO uses within the locality of the appeal site, its effect on the balance of housing types in the area and on the physical character of the area would be no greater than would result from the flat conversion scheme previously approved by the Council.

2.5 The reason for refusal did not refer to the possible impact on the character of the conservation area but local residents commenting on the appeal proposal raised this concern based on the paraphernalia associated with HMO.s; such as additional bins. On this matter the Inspector concluded that such matters could be controlled by suitably worded planning conditions and therefore he was satisfied that the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the Redlands Conservation Area.

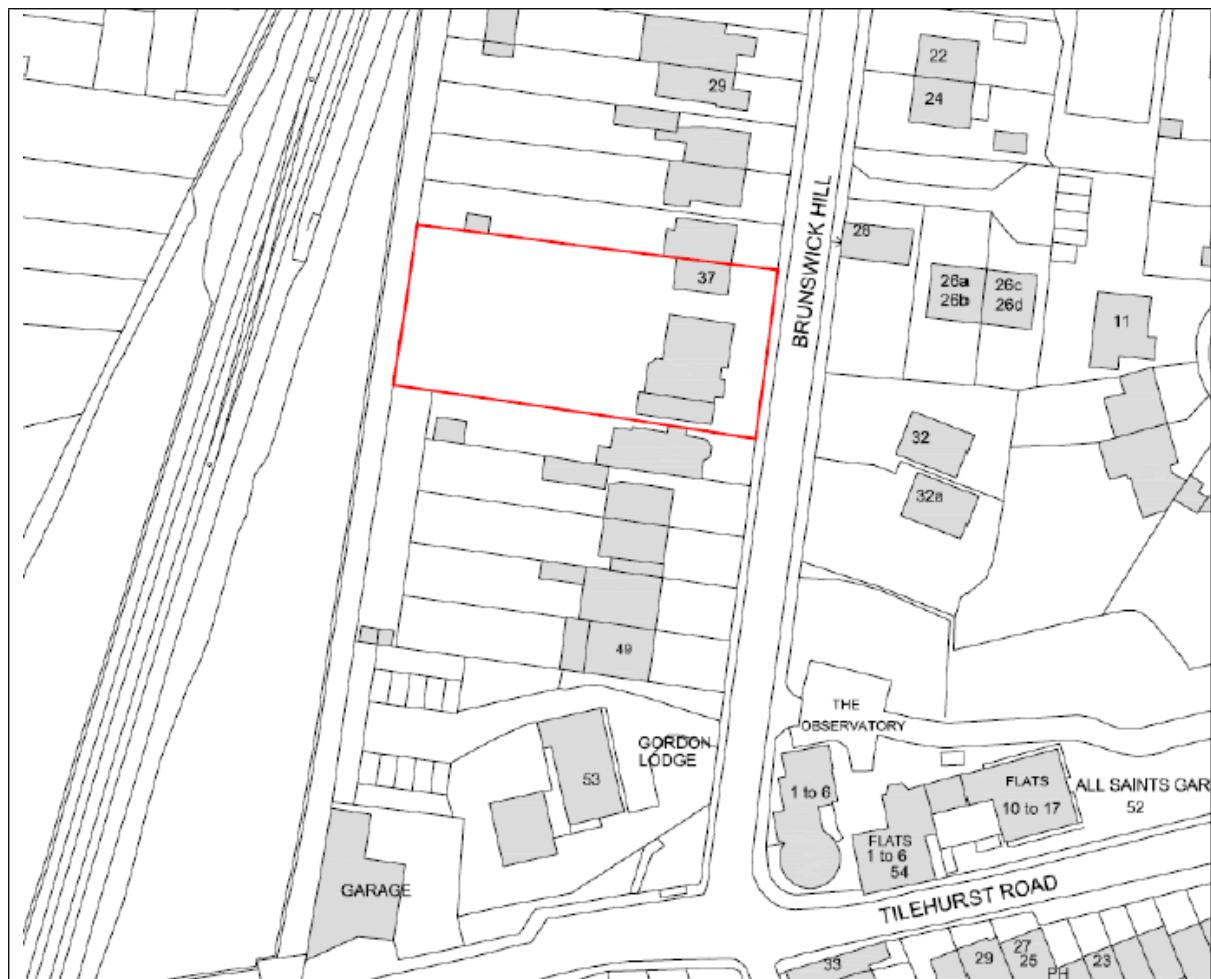
2.6 Finally, the Inspector imposed planning conditions but chose to delete our standard condition requiring the submitted management plan to be implemented (on basis that HMO.s are managed by the Council using other regulatory powers) and was critical of our parking permit conditions (again due to parking permits falling under other powers).

Comment:

This is an unwelcome decision as it has potential of undermining our house conversion policy and the integrity of the Article 4 Direction in this area. The Planning Manager has written to the Planning Inspectorate to bring to their attention the flaw in the argument that the HMO use is not different to the permitted flat conversion scheme.

However, there is some merit in the Inspector's reference to the 4 flat plus studio scheme as the "fall back" position - an alternative scheme that could be implemented. In this context of 5 households the harm of 9 bedsit units plus studio is perhaps not that significant. The issue with the imposed conditions can be managed and the Parking Permits team have confirmed that as an HMO the property would only be entitled to 2 parking permits (same as for current house). The Planning Manager has written separately to the appellant to provide the advice that we usually set out in our planning informatives on these matters.

Classification: OFFICIAL



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