

## UPDATE REPORT

<b>BY THE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES</b> <b>READING BOROUGH COUNCIL</b> <b>PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020</b>	<b>ITEM NO. 12</b>
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**Ward: Battle**

**App No: 191915/FUL**

**Address: 39 Brunswick Hill**

**Proposal: 2-storey side and 3-storey rear extension and conversion of dwelling to contain 8 flats (6 x 1-bed, 2 x 2-bed) parking, demolition of existing garage and associated works.**

**Applicant: Mr Eric Benjamin**

**Date validated: 2 December 2019**

**Target decision date: 4 February 2020 (agreed extension of time to 30/7/20)**

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Delegate to Deputy Director of Planning, Transport & Regulatory Services to:

GRANT Full Planning Permission with appropriate conditions and informatives, subject to the satisfactory completion of a S106 legal agreement by 30th July 2020 to secure the following

- Payment of £20,000 before first occupation of the 5<sup>th</sup> flat
- Provision of a deferred affordable housing contribution mechanism;
- Should the building subsequently be extended / altered (to create further units) or units subdivided then contributions to affordable housing would apply on a cumulative basis;
- a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) amount £5,000

**As per the main agenda report, with the addition of a condition for separation of rear amenity space (within lightwell).**

## **1. Further representations received**

1.1 An objection from the Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) and Reading Civic Society (RCS) has been received. In summary the comments are:

- Concerns over the loss of the garage, as an integral part of the composition of the property;
- Re-siting of 'heritage lamp post' outside of property;
- Impact of extension on amount of garden space;
- Request that gate pillar and garage be re-used as part of development of site;
- Concerns over scale and bulk of extensions;
- Noise impacts and relevance of acoustic assessment;
- Impact on neighbouring amenity;

Additional neighbour comment

1.2 One additional neighbour letter has been received in relation to drainage concerns.

## **2. Affordable Housing**

- 2.1 As stated in the main report, the applicant has submitted a viability assessment. The report outlines the facts and figures and contends that the development would not be viable with the inclusion of an affordable housing contribution. It is noted that when the previous application was considered (190522) and it was agreed that if planning permission was to be granted a deferred affordable housing contribution mechanism would be secured by a s106 agreement.
- 2.2 The Council's valuations team have reviewed the viability information submitted with the current application and determined that the scheme would not be viable with the full contribution. Instead, a £20,000.00 upfront contribution (upon occupation of the 5<sup>th</sup> unit), with a deferred contribution should the total sale value exceed the figures set out in the viability appraisal.

## **3. Additional conditions**

- 3.1 As stated in the main report, a condition is recommended to secure layout of external space. Although the rear garden space is to be used as a communal space, there is a portion of amenity space for the ground floor flats within the lightwell serving them. These areas are currently not shown to be designated for each flat, and only one flat having access to it. This has the potential to lead to privacy concerns, and as such a clear plan showing designation, and means of separation for this to be provided and approved prior to occupation of the dwellings.
- 3.2 Parking permit conditions have been included. To clarify we use 2 conditions. One requires the full postal addresses for the new dwellings to be provided to enable our records of properties in areas where parking permit schemes are in operation to be updated while the second requires the developer to notify future occupiers of the parking permit restrictions.

## **4. Public Speaking**

- 4.1 The submitted statements from the objector and the agent are appended.

**Officer: Anthony Scholes**

**From the objector - Estela Duque**

## Summary: Group Objection 2

Presented by Estela Duque

There are two conditions already identified in Planning Application #190522 still relevant to Planning Application 191915: [A] drainage, and [B] architectural character.

The drainage issue which represents a practical condition, is a result of the hard surface treatment of the landscape, in order comply with parking requirements. This is dealt with by a submission by Chris Todd-Davies.

The other condition is absent from the current Committee Report's list of 23 conditions, but forms the core argument of Group Objection #2, that the original Appeal Decision by Inspector James Taylor dated 23/01/2020 for Planning Application #190522 about the Design and impact of Character on the Area, must be upheld.

### **#39 Brunswick Hill – Architectural character and Plot size**

- The core argument of Group Objection #2 is that retaining the original fabric of the Edwardian house is not sufficient. There is a subjective element in interpreting how the new extension maintains and enhances the 'character' and appearance of the 'area'.
- **Area** encompasses not only the next-door neighbours, but also the streetscape more widely. Therein lies the importance of keeping as much of the original character of the Edwardian house intact, because #39 is one of the last two remaining on Brunswick Hill, with a plot size large enough to sufficiently change the density and urban character of the entirety of Brunswick Hill. The second house of a similar plot size is #10.

### **Definition of Character**

Before going into the details, it is important to revisit the definition of character in landscape and architectural design, which is argued to consist of three things:

[1] architectural identity, [2] affectivity, and [3] association. \*

- Architectural identity refers to a structure's iconographic and aesthetic qualities: the distinctive arrangement of individual components, decorative elements, and its place in the neighbourhood's collection of buildings and the streetscape.
- Affectivity is the quality of the structure that is actively communicated, not only to its inhabitants but the spectators, covering everyone passing it at street level.
- Association is a contribution of English aesthetic thought to the definition of character, it is the power to suggest connections to things related to the building via similitude.

### **Design and impact of character on Area**

#### **Item 7.6. Proposed two-storey side extension (Page 12)**

The extension that severely impacts on the character is the proposed two-storey side extension identified as **Area Z** and detailed as follows: **[Slide 1]**

- The architectural identity of the Edwardian house through its massing will be preserved, with only the front façade of the original walls visible at street level.
- In terms of affectivity, the new **Area Z** makes the association with low quality housing because of suggestions of crowdedness and the way it blocks the access to sun and airflow for #41.

- By association the overall massing as a result of **Area Z**, suggests the new development as a much more dense and urban structure, to those interacting with it at street level.

**Item 10.19. No. #41** (Page 14)

- Finally the impact of the side extension on No. #41 is not in terms of the habitability of the rooms, but through its Entry/Exit. The main entrance to No. #41 faces the new two storey blank brick wall, which at only a few meters away, will be encountered by the inhabitants on a daily basis. **[Slide 2]**
- Area Z houses a bedroom and bathroom significantly extends the width of the Edwardian house, and can be moved elsewhere in the proposal. **[Slide 3]**

<b>Slide 1</b>	
<b>Slide 2</b>	
<b>Slide 3</b>	

\* Source: Archer, John. 'Character in English Architectural Design,' in Eighteenth-Century Studies. Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring, 1979): 339-371.

## **From the applicant's Agent - Neil Davis**

Since the previous application was dismissed at appeal, the applicant has completely revised the proposal improving the design and reducing the scale of the building to ensure that the proposal is in keeping with the street scene and the character of the area. Most importantly this has included retaining the existing building which is recognised as a non designated heritage asset. The reduction in the scale of the development includes lowering the roof to the extension and removing the 'wrap around' roof above ground floor level which reduces the number of dwellings to 8.

The revised proposal and subsequent amendments are therefore the result of a carefully considered application sympathetically designed to meet the Council's adopted policies and standards. There are no objections to the proposal on technical grounds such as trees, ecology, noise, air quality, transport/parking etc. We have submitted reports to deal with all of these matters and on each occasion the Council's internal and external consultees have responded with a 'no objection' response. Furthermore, the officers and previous appeal Inspectors have never alleged any loss of amenity to adjoining residents.

As set out above, the current proposal is to retain the existing building with extensions to the side and to the rear. The main extension to the rear will drop down in height giving it an ancillary feel and character. The extension is traditionally designed with sympathetic articulation and well balanced fenestration detailing that respects the character of the host building. The removal of one of the apartments has enabled us to remove two parking bays providing the site with a far greater degree of green space and buffer between the rear of the extension and the parking area. This is a sustainably located site and the layout confirms that cycle space provision will meet adopted standards. There are no proposals for tree removal and no areas of ecological importance will be harmed.

This is a very large site is a sustainable location. The proposed density equates to 57dph. This is actually below the indicative range of 60-120dph as set out under Policy H2 of the local Plan and is a further indication of the applicant's sensitive approach.

The applicant has submitted an affordable housing viability report to the Council and a financial contribution of £20,000 plus an uplift should GDV exceed £2.67m has now been agreed. This represents an enhancement above earlier applications which did not include any guaranteed contributions.

In conclusion, the retention of the undesignated heritage asset with a sympathetic extension is a substantial improvement on earlier applications. The net result is that dwelling numbers are reduced, green space is increased, and it is now possible to make a guaranteed contribution towards affordable housing.

I would therefore request that Members support the officer recommendation to grant planning permission.