

APPEAL REPORT

Ward: Redlands

Appeal No: APP/E0345/W/18/3198514

Planning Ref: 171954/FUL

Site: 3-5 Craven Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5LE

Proposal: Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment to form 25 Retirement Living units (C3 use) for older persons with communal facilities, parking and associated landscaping.

Decision level: Committee (7 February 2018)

Method: Hearing

Decision: Appeal dismissed

Dates Appeal Determined: 16 November 2018

Inspector: G D Grindey MSc MRTPI Tech. Cert. Arb

SUMMARY OF DECISION

The site is located at the roundabout junction of Craven Road and Erleigh Road to the south east of the town centre and opposite the Royal Berkshire Hospital site. The site contains 3 Craven Road, which is Locally Listed in recognition of its local heritage significance. Other buildings include 5 Craven Road and a large single storey temporary building. The site is being used for healthcare provision by the NHS.

The Inspector found the main issues in this appeal to be: (i) whether the loss of the non-designated heritage asset, taking into account its significance, is outweighed by the planning benefits of the scheme; (ii) whether the scheme, by reason of its scale and footprint, would have a detrimental impact on the character & appearance of the area; (iii) whether the proposal would result in harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of no 7 Craven Road, with particular regard to privacy & overlooking; (iv) whether the loss of a street tree would be outweighed by the planning benefits of the scheme and (v) whether the proposal makes adequate provision for affordable housing.

i) On the heritage matter, the Inspector agreed with the Council's decision to Locally List the building "*given the quality of the building and notability of the work of Joseph Morris in Reading*" and found this approach "*entirely consistent with national advice*".

Although in poor decorative condition, the Inspector considered that number 3 retained the essential original design details as originally built and could be refurbished and repaired; "*all the fabric is there*". The Inspector noted the polychromatic brickwork and its similarity to other architectural detailing in surrounding streets. "*This is its significance as heritage asset; no 3 possesses highly typical architectural features of this period in Reading's history, development and growth. Of further significance is the unique connection to Joseph Morris, the leading local architect of the day. This attribute is specific to this building, as his home, (with unusual records of domestic alterations he made) so the heritage significance is more than just the surviving fabric and detailing; I find that the building and its history does enrich and enliven the area as Historic England says of locally listed buildings.*"

Noting the proposed complete demolition of the buildings, the Inspector found the scale of harm to be considerable and irreversible. The scheme would fail to

protect the historic environment and adversely affect the historic asset contrary to Policies CS33 and CS7.

The Inspector considered the benefits of the scheme as part of the balanced approach required by the NPPF. These included the delivery of specialised accommodation for older persons, which the Inspector gave considerable weight. The freeing-up of under-occupied homes; provision of a safe, less lonely environment; and the economic benefits to the town were considered, but given limited weight as these are not exclusive to the appeal scheme.

ii) In terms of the character of the area, the Inspector found the villas at 3 and 5 Craven Road to be attractive and well-proportioned, forming a strong street frontage which is typical of the area "*(even with their current shabby state)*". The Inspector agreed with the Council that the width and depth of the proposed building would give the impression of a bulky and dominant mass, "*out of scale with the best of the local character.*" The density of the development was found to be excessive given the desirability of maintaining the area's prevailing lower density suburban villa character. The Inspector found overall that that the proposals would materially harm the character and appearance of the area.

iii) In terms of neighbouring amenity, the Inspector found that large areas of glazing, main entrance, and balconies, proposed for the three storey southern elevation would face directly towards number 7 Craven Road and that this would be harmful to the amenity of this neighbour and contrary to policy. The Inspector noted that "*considerable care should be taken when inserting new development into an established residential area*".

iv) With regard to the street tree the Inspector found that "*A common sense view is that the loss of the street tree Lime is to be regretted from a public viewpoint, its replacement elsewhere within the street is not certain because a trial pit would have to be dug to check the location of underground services. Its loss could, in time, be partially compensated for with the additional planting proposed. Most of the new planting would be visible from public viewpoints and would contribute to the leafy street scene, but they would not be 'street trees'*". The Inspector concluded that the loss of the street tree would be contrary to Policy CS38 and would not accord with the Council's adopted Tree Strategy.

v) The question of whether the proposal makes adequate provision for affordable housing was considered. The Inspector noted that National Planning Policy Guidance states that the role for 'viability assessment' is primarily at plan making stage. With this in mind, the Inspector also noted the up-to-date review of residential development viability which supports emerging Local Plan Policy H3 and which concludes that the 30% affordable housing targets are viable. The Inspector found this to be an "*important consideration*". Against this background. The Inspector heard viability submissions from both parties. The key issues were the calculation of the Existing Use Value of the site and the question of what would be a reasonable premium above the EUV "*to provide a reasonable incentive to bring forward the land for development while allowing a sufficient contribution to comply with policy requirements*". The Council argued a 10% premium was appropriate whereas the Appellant argued 20%. The Inspector found the Council's lower figure to be preferable given the poor

decorative condition of the buildings, their unsuitability for commercial use, and the uncertainty over the potential for a higher value alternative use.

In conclusion the Inspector determined that the scheme would remove a locally listed building of typical architectural detailing, which enlivens the street scene and which has unique links to a leading local architect; it would harm the character and appearance of the area including the loss of a healthy street tree; it would harm the living conditions of nearby occupiers in no 7 and would fail to deliver appropriate affordable housing. Importantly the Inspector stated that her conclusions on any single issue (i) to (v) would be sufficient to dismiss the appeal.

HPDRS COMMENTS ON THE DECISION:

This decision is very welcome as it justifies the Council's approach in seeking to protect the locally listed building and is a good example of applying a balanced approach to decision-taking. It also confirms the Council's approach to applying policies which seek to preserve the character of Reading, including the protection of existing trees.

The decision explains the importance of seeking to protect the amenity of neighbours when accommodating new development.

The Inspector's reasoning provides useful support to the Council's approach to securing affordable housing through planning decisions.

The full decision is available to view at:

http://planning.reading.gov.uk/fastweb_PL/welcome.asp using ref. 171954

Case Officer: Steve Vigar



Site Photograph



Proposed Site Layout Plan

Computer Generated Images - Existing and Proposed View North from Craven Road



Computer Generated Images - Existing and Proposed
View South from roundabout



Existing View 5



Verified Visual Mockup 5