

Ward: Minster

Appeal No: APP/E0345/W/20/3261092

Planning Ref: 200571

Site: 4 Downshire Square, Reading RG1 6NJ

Proposal: Demolition of existing dwelling house and large detached garage and erection of new building comprising of 3 townhouses and 2 flats

Decision level: Delegated decision on 17/07/2020

Method: Written representations

Decision: Appeal Dismissed

Date Determined: 27/04/2021

Inspector: M Chalk BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The appeal site relates to a detached bungalow, one of the widest plots along this part of Downshire Square. The site is within the Downshire Square Conservation Area and the area is predominantly residential, featuring large detached and semi-detached residential properties although No.9 (opposite) is used as a care home and the Grade II listed All Saints Church is to the north at the top of the Downshire Square road.

1.2 A previous application on the site was refused 24/1/2020 for “Erection of new building comprising 9 flats following demolition of existing bungalow and detached garage”.

1.3 The application subject of this appeal was refused under delegated powers in July 2020 for five reasons, which in summary were:

1. Overly prominent development in its context and overdevelopment of the site
2. Detailed design and materials and mass/bulk not being of sufficiently high-quality design (impact on conservation area)
3. Failure to demonstrate compliance with adopted parking standards
4. Failure to demonstrate suitable replacement of street tree
5. Lack of an appropriate contribution towards affordable housing (and subsequent absence of legal agreement to secure affordable housing).

1.4 The applicant appealed against this decision to the Planning Inspectorate.

2 SUMMARY OF DECISION

2.1 The Inspector considered the four main issues to be:

- Whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Downshire Square Conservation Area;
- The effect on street trees;
- Whether it would make adequate provision for car parking associated with the development; and
- Whether it would contribute to the affordable housing needs of the Borough

2.2 On the first main issue, the Inspector considered that the proposed building at three storey would present a largely unbroken frontage to the street scene with limited articulation due to its detailed design. The Inspector concurred with the LPA that the building would be uncommonly tall and broad, with little space either side of the building. The Inspector agreed that it was the combination of height, width and siting within the plot that would result in the proposed building appearing both cramped and unduly prominent within the street scene. The Inspector concluded that overall, the proposals would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, conflicting with Policies CC7, H11, EN1, EN3 and EN6.

2.3 Moving on to the second main issue, the Inspector agreed with the conclusions of the Downshire Square Conservation Area Appraisal which identifies the collective contribution

that street trees make to the overall character and coherence of the street scene and wider Conservation Area. Furthermore, the Inspector made reference to the importance of individual trees. The Inspector acknowledged the appellant's suggestion that a recently planted street tree could be relocated (to allow for the proposed dropped kerb/access through the undercroft of the building to parking at the rear of the site) but considered that in the absence of evidence to show how this could be realistically achieved, that the removal of the street tree would likely result in a large and uncharacteristic gap between trees in the street scene. Further to this, the Inspector did not consider that new planting proposed within the site boundary, that would not reach the heights of the mature trees lining Downshire Square, would be an acceptable replacement for the existing street tree and would therefore cause harm to the character of the area. The Inspector considered this would be contrary to Policies CC7, EN3 and EN14.

- 2.4 In terms of the impact on parking provision, the Inspector concurred with the LPA that the proposals - which did not comply with the adopted parking standards - could lead to an unacceptable increase in the amount of on-street car parking resulting in increased congestion and difficult vehicle manoeuvres with no evidence submitted to suggest that this would not be the case. The Inspector considered that the proposed development would fail to make adequate provision for car parking which would be contrary to Policies TR3 and TR5.
- 2.5 Finally, the Inspector concluded that given the lack of a completed S106 legal agreement, the proposals failed to contribute to the affordable housing needs of the Borough, contrary to Policies H3 and CC9.
- 2.6 In providing an overall conclusion, the Inspector considered that whilst the proposal would provide four additional dwellings (as well as some economic benefit through construction), given the small scale, this would be a modest contribution to housing and economic needs that would not outweigh the harm identified in respect of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, the loss of the street tree, the failure to make adequate provision for car parking and failure to make provision for affordable housing.
- 2.7 The Inspector concluded that all the Council's reasons for refusal should be supported and dismissed the appeal.

Head of Planning, Development & Regulatory Services Comment:

This is a pleasing decision, with the Inspector endorsing the conclusion reached by officers and agreeing with all original reasons for refusal. Officers are pleased that the Inspector recognised the impact the proposed development would have had on the Downshire Square Conservation Area, as well as supporting the importance of street trees and the contribution they make to the street scene and wider Conservation Area.

Case officer: Ethne Humphreys