

APPEAL DECISION REPORT

Ward: Thames

Appeal No: APP/E0345/W/22/3298362

Application Ref: 210544/FUL

Address: Land adjacent to The Moorings, Mill Green, Caversham, Reading

Proposal: Vehicular access with permeable surface on land south of Mill Green to provide access to The Moorings

Case officer: Claire Ringwood

Decision level: Committee. Refused 7th February 2022

Method: Written Representations. Decision: Appeal dismissed

Date Determined: 15th November 2022

Inspector: M.P Howell BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

1. Background

1.1 The appeal site relates to a thin strip of land to the south of a pedestrian footpath from Mill Green. The footpath runs from the end of Mill Green to Piggott's Road. The reasons for refusal of application 210544 were:

1. The proposed new vehicular access is considered to be unacceptable in principle as it will lead to harmful impacts in terms of urbanisation of this green lane, an adverse effect on wildlife habitat along this designated Green Link, unclear impacts on landscaping/trees, drainage and flooding and an overall harmful visual effect on the natural character of this area of the Thames environs. These concerns are not outweighed by any planning benefits arising from providing the new access. For these reasons the application is contrary to policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm); EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network); EN13 (Major Landscape Features and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty); EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands); and EN18 (Flooding and Drainage) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).
2. The works proposed would have an adverse effect on road safety and the flow of traffic. Further, the construction design with a standard flush edging adjacent to the existing footpath is also likely to result in conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, with vehicles over-running the footway to pass each other. The proposal would fail to provide for suitable pedestrian and highway safety, contrary to with Policy TR3 (Access, Traffic and Highway Related Matters) of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

2 Summary of the decision

2.1 The Inspector considered the main issues were the effect of the proposed development on: 1) the character and appearance of the area, including trees; 2) the green network; 3) road and pedestrian safety; and 4) drainage and flooding.

2.2 Character and appearance of the area, including trees. The Inspector stated the proximity of the footpath to the river, together with the surrounding gardens and trees, resulted in a tranquil and verdant character and appearance in an otherwise built-up urban area. The Inspector also commented that the proposed development would result in the removal of low-lying scrub and vegetation and the replacement of the ditch would harden the appearance of the footpath and this harm would be exacerbated by the prominence and length of the access track which would detract from the tranquil and verdant character and appearance of the site.

- 2.3 The Inspector stated that individually the trees close to the site were not worthy of protection but agreed with the Council that the trees could be affected, and were important in visual amenity terms, not least due to their position, number and prominence within the locality. The Inspector continued that, as a group, the trees have an amenity value that is significant along the footpath which helps to screen the adjacent commercial boatyard. In this regards the Inspector found the trees to be important as they contribute to the tranquil and verdant character and appearance of the area. Although replacement trees could be provided off-site the Inspector considered that this would not offset the harm the proposed development would have on the collective amenity value of the trees within the boatyard.
- 2.4 The Inspector however did not agree with the Council on the impact of the proposed development on the Major Landscape Feature due to this section of the footpath not providing outward views of the River Thames.
- 2.5 Green Network: The appeal site, along with the remainder of Mill Green forms part of an allocated green link identified in the Reading Borough Local Plan and although not a site with an identified biodiversity interest. The appellant had made recommendations for mitigation and enhancement, but the Inspector felt that the site has potential for biodiversity value which ‘stitches the green network together.’ The Inspector concluded that the proposal which includes the removal of low-level scrub, vegetation and trees would fail to maintain, protect, consolidate, extend or enhance the existing green link and would lead to the fragmentation of the green network.
- 2.6 Road and Pedestrian Safety: The Inspector commented that based on the evidence before him it was not possible to ascertain whether the proposed development could achieve a minimum of 2.75m width along its length in accordance with advice and guidance set out in Manual for Streets. The Inspector concluded that the proposed development fails to demonstrate that the access track would be a sufficient width to allow a private car to access The Moorings safely as well as manoeuvre into and out in a forward gear. Furthermore, a narrow road width, below 2.75m, could result in a conflict between vehicles and pedestrians or cyclists utilising Mill Green, resulting in an increased risk of incidents to the detriment of the road and pedestrian safety.
- 2.7 Drainage and Flooding: The Inspector concluded that, subject to conditions, the proposed development would not have an adverse impact upon flooding and drainage at the site or the surrounding area.

3 OFFICER COMMENTS

- 3.1 Officers are very pleased that the Inspector endorsed the conclusion reached by Officers and recognised the impact the proposed development would have on the character and appearance of the area, including trees, the green network and road and pedestrian safety.
- 3.2 However, Officers are also aware of current activities at or near the appeal site, which are currently under investigation.

LOCATION PLAN



Case Officer: Claire Ringwood