

COLD ASH 13/00799 Pins Ref 2206942	Sylvan House, Fishers Lane, Cold Ash C Concept Ltd	Proposed code level 6 eco house sustainable with associated parking and amenity	Delegated Refusal	Dismissed 6.2.14
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Main Issue

The main issue in this case is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

The appeal site is in an area of low density residential development near the edge of the settlement of Cold Ash. The area is characterised by large dwellings in spacious, well landscaped plots and set back from the road. Trees and roadside hedges dominate the built form, giving the lane a semi-rural quality.

Relevant policy guidance is contained within the document 'Quality Design - West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Part 2 – Residential Development' (adopted 19 June 2006). This SPD seeks, amongst other things, a reduction in density on the outer edge of development which is close to the edge of a settlement, to ensure that it respects the interface between open countryside and the built form.

The appellant argues that the proposal addresses the concerns of the Inspector who dismissed an earlier appeal on the site (Ref. APP/W0340/A/12/2186274). The design of the current proposal is materially different from that submitted previously; the dwelling would have a smaller footprint, lower overall height and significantly reduced scale and bulk. The massing would be broken up by presenting a narrow two storey gable towards the road, with single storey lean-to wings on either side. Site levels would be reduced to achieve a slab level 1 metre lower than with the previous scheme.

These factors all weigh in favour of the proposal. The proposed design is creative and the dwelling would add to the varied mix of architectural styles along Fishers Lane. The fact that the dwelling would be built to Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes standard is also a benefit.

However, nothing alters the fact that the site is small in relation to others in the immediate locality. The proposed dwelling would fill the majority of the width of the plot with only limited space on either side. This would contribute towards a cramped appearance which would be at odds with the prevailing character of dwellings in spacious plots.

The Inspector did not share the appellant's view that the development would be secluded. The removal of existing vegetation along the road frontage has opened up the site to views from the lane and replacement hedge planting would take several years to mature sufficiently to screen the site. Even then, there would be views of the dwelling through the driveway entrance.

The dwelling would be sited nearer to the road than the properties on either side, and it would be closer than the previous proposal. This would increase the dwelling's prominence in views through the entrance, and would counteract the benefits gained from reducing the height, scale and bulk, and lowering the slab level.

The Inspector noted from his site inspection that the required visibility splays would be achievable now that vegetation on the frontage of the site has been removed. New hedge planting would be required along the rear edge of the eastern splay. However, deep and lengthy visibility splays for individual accesses are not commonplace in Fishers Lane. Although the new hedging is shown on

the plans as being closer to the road than under the previous proposal, the tapered splay would still appear rather alien.

To conclude on the main issue, the development would be cramped and it would fail to respect the character and appearance of the area. It would not constitute sympathetic infill, as sought by the Cold Ash and Ashmore Green Village Design Statement, and the small plot size would not be compatible with the objective set out in the SPD to reduce densities towards the edge of settlements.

Whilst the principle of residential development within the settlement boundary is acceptable under Policy HSG.1 of the adopted West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006, the proposal would conflict with the detailed criteria of Policy HSG.1 which seek to ensure that new development has regard to local context. The proposal would also be contrary to Policy CS14 of the adopted West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) which seeks high quality and sustainable design that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area.

Other Matters

The Council considers that financial contributions are required to mitigate the impact of the proposed development on local infrastructure, services and amenities. Although the appellant has suggested that a unilateral undertaking will be prepared, no planning obligation was before him. However, since the Inspector was dismissing the appeal for other reasons, the decision does not turn on this matter. He therefore did not need to consider whether the obligation would meet the tests of regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) 3 Regulations 2010 and paragraph 204 of the National Planning Policy Framework ("The Framework").

The Framework is cited in support of the proposal, and in particular its presumption in favour of sustainable development. There are three dimensions to sustainability: economic, social and environmental. The proposal would undoubtedly bring some economic benefits during construction and social benefits through the provision of an additional dwelling. However, these positives would be outweighed by the harm which the development would cause to the local environment. The benefits of providing a dwelling to Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes are not so exceptional as to outweigh this harm.

The appellant makes reference to a recent planning permission for extensions and garaging at Pump House. Details of this development were not before the Inspector and therefore it was difficult to determine whether there are any parallels. In any event, proposals must be considered on their own merits.

The Inspector took into account the concerns amongst local residents regarding drainage and run-off issues. However, there is no technical evidence to support the objections and both the Council and the Environment Agency are satisfied with the foul and surface water drainage arrangements.

Conclusion

For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, the Inspector concluded that the appeal should be dismissed.

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