
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 September 2026

by **Laura Cuthbert BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 01 October 2026

Appeal Ref: 6011062

Thamesfield Retirement Village, Wargrave Road, Remenham RG9 2LX

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Retirement Villages Development Limited against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 243125.
 - The development proposed is Part demolition of existing building and replacement with a three-storey extension to provide extra-care units (Use Class C2), with associated soft and hard landscaping works; provision of additional vehicle parking, bin stores and ancillary structures; and alterations to existing basement.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. A revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published in August 2026. Comments were sought from the main parties on the implications of the revised Framework for the determination of the appeal, and I have taken those comments into account. Accordingly, I have determined the appeal having regard to the policies of the revised Framework.
3. Reasons for refusal 3, 4 and 5 related to the absence of a planning obligation. However, a signed Section 106 Agreement dated 9 June 2026 has since been submitted. The Agreement secures:
 - an Employment and Skills Plan, or an agreed financial contribution in lieu;
 - the implementation and monitoring of the approved Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan to secure Biodiversity Net Gain objectives for a period of 30 years; and
 - a financial contribution of £15,405 towards local NHS infrastructure.
4. The Council has confirmed that it is not pursuing reasons for refusal 3, 4 and 5 in light of the completed Agreement. Accordingly, I am content that these matters have now been satisfactorily addressed and do not form part of my main issues.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on:
 - the living conditions of the existing occupants at Remenham Row, in particular regard to privacy and outlook; and

- the character and appearance of the area, notably on the significance of the designated heritage assets of Remenham and Henley Bridge Conservation Area, by development within it, and the effect on the significance of the designated heritage asset of Henley on Thames Conservation Area, by development within its setting.

Reasons

Living Conditions

6. The appeal site comprises an existing retirement home and lies adjacent to the residential properties known as Remenham Row to the north-west. The proposal would replace a lower built form on the northern part of the site with a larger three-storey extension. The nearest properties at Remenham Row comprise a short terrace (Nos 1 to 5) within a private gated development, set slightly below the level of the appeal site. The dwellings have front-facing living room windows at ground-floor level and bedroom and bathroom windows at first-floor level that look towards the proposed extension. The properties also benefit from front and communal garden areas from which the development would be experienced.
7. In regard to outlook, the proposed extension would present a substantially more prominent and dominant built form than presently exists. I acknowledge that the proposed extension would be set further from the boundary than the building it would replace and that a degree of openness would remain between the development and Remenham Row. Nevertheless, the proposal would replace a largely single-storey building with a substantially taller and bulkier three-storey structure. As a result, it would become a considerably more dominant feature in views from the neighbouring dwellings and communal residential areas. Taking account of its increased height, massing and elevated position relative to Remenham Row, I find that the proposal would appear unduly prominent and would result in a materially greater sense of enclosure than exists at present.
8. The increased scale and visual presence of the development would materially alter and harm the outlook currently experienced by the neighbouring occupants at Remenham Row. Although landscaping may soften some views over time, it would not adequately mitigate the scale, massing and prominence of the extension. Consequently, I find that the proposal would have an unacceptable overbearing effect on the outlook from the front-facing windows, front gardens and communal garden areas serving 1 to 5 Remenham Row.
9. The appellant places considerable reliance on the separation distances between the proposed extension and the properties at Remenham Row, which would range from approximately 21.4m to 26m. Reference is also made to the removal of projecting balconies in favour of Juliet balconies, the oblique angle between the buildings and the submitted daylight and sunlight assessment, which identifies no significant adverse impacts in terms of daylight or sunlight.
10. Whilst I have had regard to these matters, I do not find the relationship between the proposal and Remenham Row to be readily comparable to either a conventional front-to-front or back-to-back arrangement. Notably, the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (the Design Guide SPD) (June 2012) makes clear that character and context are important considerations and that separation distances are guidelines rather than absolute standards. Consequently, compliance

with those guidelines does not, in itself, demonstrate that a proposal would preserve neighbouring living conditions.

11. Of particular relevance is the fact that Remenham Row forms part of a private gated residential development. The areas between the dwellings and the appeal site are not public highway or a typical street frontage but comprise part of the residential environment enjoyed by occupiers, albeit on a communal basis. Consequently, residents can reasonably expect a greater degree of privacy than may be the case in a more conventional street setting.
12. I have also taken account of the fact that Remenham Row is situated at a slightly lower level than the appeal site. Accordingly, the relationship between the development and neighbouring dwellings is influenced not only by the horizontal separation distances but also by the relative levels between them. This would increase the prominence of the proposed extension when viewed from neighbouring properties and garden areas.
13. I acknowledge that the existing outlook from Remenham Row already includes built development associated with Thamesfield. However, the proposal would replace a largely single-storey element of development with a substantially taller and bulkier building. Whilst the submitted daylight and sunlight assessment indicates that the proposal would not result in significant losses of daylight or sunlight to neighbouring occupiers, the absence of such effects does not necessarily mean that the development would preserve outlook.
14. In relation to privacy, the elevation facing Remenham Row would contain numerous upper-floor windows serving habitable accommodation, including living, dining and kitchen areas as well as bedrooms. Whilst the buildings would not directly face one another in a parallel arrangement and the outlook would be experienced at an oblique angle, occupants of the proposed extension would nevertheless be able to look towards the dwellings and residential areas associated with Remenham Row. Consequently, the proposal would increase opportunities for overlooking when compared with the existing situation.
15. R15 of the Design Guide SPD states that the appropriate degree of privacy varies, with less distance being reasonable on the street-facing side of development and more on private elevations, and that privacy depends upon how rooms relate to one another. In this case, the affected frontage at Remenham Row is private rather than public. Moreover, the relationship would be between proposed habitable room windows, including living accommodation, and existing habitable room windows serving the principal living areas of the properties at Remenham Row. This is therefore not a relationship in which reduced expectations of privacy would ordinarily apply.
16. Whilst the separation distance between the buildings is not insignificant and the relationship would be experienced at an angle, the proposal would introduce a substantial number of additional upper-floor habitable room windows facing towards Remenham Row. Having regard to the guidance in R15, the private nature of the affected elevation and the relationship between habitable rooms, reinforced by the appeal site's higher ground level relative to Remenham Row, I find that the proposal would result in a materially greater perception of overlooking and an unacceptable effect on the privacy of occupiers of Remenham Row.

17. Taking these matters together, I find that the proposal would result in both an overbearing relationship and a harmful loss of privacy for the existing occupants of Remenham Row. Consequently, I conclude that the development would have an unacceptable effect on the living conditions of existing occupants of Remenham Row, with particular regard to outlook and privacy. It would conflict with Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Core Strategy (Core Strategy) (2010), which requires development to be of an appropriate scale, mass, layout, built form and height and to avoid detriment to the amenities of adjoining occupiers and their quality of life. It would also conflict with the Design Guide SPD insofar as it seeks to secure appropriate standards of residential amenity. Furthermore, it would conflict with Policy DP3 of the Framework, which requires development to respond positively to its context so that it integrates with and enhances its surroundings, which the proposal would fail to achieve.
18. The Council also refers to Policy P3 of the Framework. However, that policy is principally concerned with living conditions in relation to matters such as daylight and sunlight, together with air, noise, light, water and other forms of pollution. The evidence before me does not indicate material concerns in respect of those matters. Accordingly, whilst I have had regard to Policy P3, I do not find it to be determinative in this case.

Heritage Assets

19. The appeal site occupies a prominent position on the Berkshire bank of the Thames and forms part of a highly visible stretch of river corridor experienced from public rights of way, the river itself, Henley Bridge and the Oxfordshire bank. It forms part of the wider Thamesfield retirement village complex, centred on a mid-19th century riverside mansion, with grounds running around the building and down to the riverbank. Whilst the building has been altered and extended over time, the original Victorian element remains readily identifiable and retains a prominent presence in views from across the river and within the surrounding riverside townscape. The grounds along the riverbank allow for open views of the building from the opposite side of the river. Consequently, despite the alterations and extensions, the appeal site contributes positively to the character and appearance of the area.
20. The site lies within the Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area (CA) and contributes to the setting of the Henley-on-Thames CA, which lies on the western side of the River Thames opposite the appeal site. It also lies within the setting of a number of listed buildings, including the Grade I listed Henley Bridge and other designated heritage assets associated with the historic riverside environment.
21. I note the Council's view that the original mansion building should be regarded as a non-designated heritage asset by virtue of its architectural and historic interest and its contribution to the character and appearance of the area, albeit it has not been formally identified as such through the development plan process nor is it on a local heritage list. However, the principal heritage issue before me concerns the effect of the proposal on the significance of the Remenham Henley Bridge CA and the setting of the Henley-on-Thames CA.
22. The significance of these CA's for the purposes of this appeal derives not only from their collection of historic buildings, but also from the distinctive character of the River Thames corridor. This includes the strong visual relationship between built

form on either side of the river, the prominence of landmark buildings set within landscaped grounds, the spacious and verdant quality of the riverbanks and important views both across and along the river. Thamesfield contributes positively to that significance through the prominence of the original Victorian building within generous landscaped grounds, the visual separation between the riverside mansion and surrounding built form, and the attractive landscaped backdrop provided in views from the river, and the Oxfordshire bank.

23. The appellant's heritage evidence concludes that the proposal would cause no harm to either CA and no harm to nearby listed buildings. However, the Council and Historic England consider the proposed extension to be excessively large and bulky within its sensitive riverside setting, with Historic England identifying the proposed third floor as the principal source of harm.
24. Although visibility of development from public viewpoints is not, in itself, harmful, in this case harm would arise from the scale, bulk, height and massing of the proposed extension. In this regard, the proposal would replace a relatively modest building on the northern part of the site with a substantially larger three-storey extension. Whilst I acknowledge the design amendments made during the application process, including revisions to the roof form, the proposed extension would nevertheless appear substantially larger than the building it would replace.
25. I find that the additional height, particularly at third-floor level, together with the increased bulk and massing of the extension, would compete visually with the original Victorian mansion and diminish its prominence as the principal historic component of the Thamesfield complex. The proposal would also introduce a more dominant and urbanising form of development into a riverside setting whose character is derived in part from the balance between substantial historic buildings, generous landscaped grounds and relatively open views.
26. As a consequence, the proposal would erode the spacious and verdant qualities that contribute positively to the significance of the CA's. It would reduce the visual separation presently experienced between the historic mansion and surrounding development and alter the established relationship between the building and its landscaped setting. In doing so, it would diminish the contribution that the site presently makes to the character and appearance of the riverside townscape.
27. These effects would be apparent in views from the River Thames, the Oxfordshire bank and other publicly accessible locations within and around the CA's. Whilst the proposal would not prevent appreciation of the heritage assets, it would detract from the way in which the historic mansion is experienced within its riverside setting and would thereby harm the significance of both CA's.
28. I have also considered the effect of the proposal on the setting of nearby listed buildings, including the Grade I listed Henley Bridge. Notably, the Council has not identified any harm to the significance of those assets arising from changes to their settings. Having regard to the intervening distance, existing vegetation and built form, together with the nature of the views available, I am not persuaded that the proposal would result in any separate harm to the significance of nearby listed buildings. The principal heritage effects arise in relation to the CA's.
29. Consequently, I find that the proposal would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the area harming the significance of the Remenham and Henley Bridge CA through development within it. It would also harm the significance of the

Henley-on-Thames CA through development within its setting. Accordingly, I find that the proposal would give rise to heritage harm that engages the heritage objectives of Policy TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) and Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy, together with the heritage provisions of Policies HE4, HE5, HE6, HE7 and HE9 of the Framework.

30. The proposal would harm the significance of designated heritage assets. However, having regard to the asset's significance and the nature and extent of the effects identified, I find that the degree of harm would be limited. Nevertheless, Policy HE6.1 of the Framework states that substantial weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. I have therefore attached considerable importance and weight to that harm. Policy HE6.4 of the Framework states that where a development proposal would harm the significance of a designated heritage asset, the effect on the asset and its significance should be weighed against any public benefits resulting from the proposal.
31. The Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. The proposal would redevelop the existing building to provide 17 C2 apartments. Taking account of the existing accommodation, the proposal would provide a net increase of 13 units. In the context of the Council's housing land supply shortfall, I attach significant weight to this benefit.
32. I also acknowledge the identified need for specialist accommodation for older persons. The evidence before me indicates a substantial unmet need for such accommodation within the borough. Whilst an interested party disputes the extent of that need and the weight that should be attributed to the additional units proposed, I nevertheless attach significant weight to the contribution the proposal would make towards meeting the needs of older persons.
33. I attach moderate weight to the efficient use of previously developed land and the contribution that the proposal would make towards the continued provision of specialist accommodation at Thamesfield.
34. The appellant contends that the expansion of Thamesfield is important to the long-term viability of the retirement community, arguing that rising operating costs have placed increasing pressure on the existing facility and that additional units would assist in spreading those costs across a larger resident base. Whilst I have taken this evidence into account, I attach only limited weight to this benefit given that it is based principally on the appellant's own assessment of the operation and financial performance of the facility.
35. The proposal would also deliver environmental benefits. These include biodiversity net gain in excess of 10%, additional landscaping, the creation of a woodland walk and sustainability measures anticipated to significantly reduce operational carbon emissions compared with baseline building regulations requirements. The site is also located adjacent to existing built development and services. These matters attract moderate weight in favour of the proposal.
36. There would also be economic benefits through construction activity, investment in the site, employment opportunities and expenditure within the local economy. Social benefits would arise through the provision of additional specialist accommodation for older persons, supporting independent living, health and wellbeing, and reducing social isolation. The proposal may also assist in releasing

larger homes back into the wider housing market through downsizing. I attach moderate weight to these benefits.

37. Drawing these matters together, I find that the proposal would deliver substantial public benefits. Having attached considerable importance and weight to the identified heritage harm, I nevertheless find that these substantial public benefits outweigh that harm. Accordingly, I find that the identified heritage harm is outweighed by the public benefits.
38. Furthermore, even if I were to accept the Council's contention that the original Thamesfield building constitutes a non-designated heritage asset, I would not find the proposal would cause any greater heritage harm than that already identified in relation to the CA's. In any event, having regard to the public benefits set out above, I would find that any harm to the significance of a non-designated heritage asset would also be outweighed by those benefits.

Other Matters

39. The appeal site lies within the Green Belt. However, I am satisfied that the proposal would constitute not inappropriate development in the Green Belt, comprising the partial redevelopment of previously developed land and satisfying the relevant provisions of national Green Belt policy. In addition, the proposal would meet the Framework's grey belt provisions. However, these matters do not alter my findings on the main issues or the overall outcome of the appeal.
40. Interested parties raise concerns regarding the effect of the proposal on existing residents of Thamesfield. In particular, concerns are expressed regarding the loss of the existing lounge, the removal of a covered walkway linking parts of the retirement village and the effect of the proposal on the outlook and daylight available to some existing apartments. Whilst I have taken these matters into account, replacement communal facilities would be provided as part of the wider redevelopment proposals, and I have insufficient evidence before me to conclude that the proposal would result in unacceptable living conditions for existing Thamesfield residents. Consequently, whilst I have had regard to these concerns, they do not materially affect my findings on the main issues.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

41. Policy S5 of the Framework identifies certain forms of development that may be appropriate outside settlement boundaries. Criterion d) includes the redevelopment of previously developed land such as that proposed here. Policy S5 further requires decision-makers to assess whether the benefits of such development would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects when assessed against the national decision-making policies of the Framework.
42. I have found that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the living conditions of existing occupants at Remenham Row, with particular regard to outlook and privacy contrary to Policy DP3 of the Framework.
43. Criterion 3 of Policy DP3 states that development proposals should be refused if, without clear justification, they conflict with paragraph 1 of the policy, relevant aspects of the principles in paragraph 2, or any explicit design standards set out in the development plan. The policy further states that substantial weight should be

given to compliance with relevant development plan policies when assessing the design quality of proposals.

44. While the benefits I outline above are significant, they do not in my view, provide clear justification to allow development that would harm the living conditions of the existing residents in the manner I have described. Accordingly, I find that the proposal conflicts with Policy DP3.
45. Policy S5(2) states that circumstances in which the benefits of approving development proposals are likely to be substantially outweighed by adverse effects include where a proposal fails to comply with a national decision-making policy that states development should be refused in specific circumstances. As I have found that the proposal conflicts with Policy DP3, I consider this to be such a case. Accordingly, I find that the benefits of the proposal would be substantially outweighed by the adverse effects. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policy S5 of the Framework.
46. I have had regard to the Council officer's original assessment, which concluded that the proposal would result in only limited harm to neighbouring living conditions and that such harm would be outweighed by the benefits of the scheme. However, as decision-maker, I am required to undertake my own assessment of the evidence before me. For the reasons set out above, I find that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to occupiers at Remenham Row through its overbearing effect and loss of privacy, resulting in significant harm to their living conditions. I attach substantial weight to that harm.
47. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal conflicts with the development plan when read as a whole. There are no material considerations, including the Framework, which would outweigh that conflict. For the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

Laura Cuthbert

INSPECTOR