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WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Dear Sir(s)

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Appeal by Mr Mark Weaver

Site Address: 510 Reading Road, Winnersh, Wokingham, RG41 5PX

The case for refusing the application is set out in the Officer's report and decision notice that are attached in appendices 1 and 2. There are however several additional points the LPA wish to draw the Inspector's attention to in reference to the Appellant's Statement and appendices.

The External Appearance of the Building:

To begin with, the Appellant has referred to the fact that specific chapters/paragraphs within the Borough Design Guide and National Planning Policy Framework are not referenced within Reason for Refusal 1. A brief summary of each conflict is addressed in turn below.

With regards to the Borough Design Guide, the purpose of this supplementary planning document as a whole is to ensure that development is well designed in accordance with its recommendations. From the LPA's perspective, the Officer Report for this application has already outlined why the development is not well designed within the context of its surroundings.

That said, section 4.2 of the Borough Design Guide, specifically R1, states the following (emphasis added in bold):

*“Residential development should be designed to **contribute positively towards the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area.** This may be achieved through **blending in with a strongly positive existing character**, responding where relevant to the positive elements of its historic context or, **where the site is large enough to allow for a distinctive identity to be created, by establishing a new character that relates well to the existing.**”* (Page 34)

R23 of the Borough Design Guide also states the following:

“Alterations and extensions to buildings should:

- be well designed;*
- respond positively to the original building;*
- contribute positively to the local character; and*
- relate well to neighbouring properties.”*

The Officer Report clearly explains how the height of the building in the site’s context does not blend in with the existing character of the area and would fail to maintain the quality of the environment. Clear conflicts with these wordings are noted.

Turning to the National Planning Policy Framework, the Appellant has highlighted the most relevant paragraphs of the document within paragraph 3.8 of their Appeal Statement. From the LPA’s perspective, the development does not involve the creation of a high quality building (paragraph 131 of the NPPF), nor would it be sympathetic to the local character of the area or add to its overall quality (paragraph 135 of the NPPF).

Reverting to the Appellant’s main argument regarding this Reason for Refusal, they state that the following within paragraph 3.11 of their Appeal Statement:

“It is clear through their assessment of the scheme that the Council do not object to the actual appearance of the building but rather the appearance of the building in relation to neighbouring properties and the wider area. It is therefore considered that in terms of Policy CP3, the proposal constitutes a high level of

design quality, but what appears to be in debate is, notwithstanding this design quality there are concerns over whether it respects the appearance of the surrounding area.”

At no point within the Officer Report does it state that no objections are raised to the external appearance of the building and it is not reasonable for the Appellant to assume this. Good design does not just focus on the appearance of a building in isolation from its surroundings; new development must also contribute positively and enhance the underlying character and quality of the local area to be considered such.

There are no outstanding or notable architectural techniques involved with the proposals, it is simply a replication of the existing building's architectural form but on a larger, taller scale. The narrowness of the plot and clear lack of separation distances from neighbouring properties/land means that the 11.8 metre tall building would appear disproportionately large and cramped within this modest residential plot, exacerbating its visual harm in relation to neighbouring properties. Its height compared to nearby properties would be notably taller, especially dwarfing the adjacent nos.508 and 512 Reading Road.

It is acknowledged that Reading Road is characterised by a variety of buildings heights and architectural designs. In particular, the Appellant draws attention to the cluster of three storey blocks of flats 200 metres west on Reading Road, which are taller in height than the proposed height of the appeal proposals. The LPA have already acknowledged these blocks of flats within the Officer Report; these buildings are well offset from Reading Road by large areas of amenity grassland and mature tree planting on their northern frontage, giving a spacious feel to their immediate surroundings. This is not the case for the Appeal proposals; the building only maintains a 0.5 metre separation distances from the western and eastern side boundaries

On another note, paragraph 3.15 of the Appellant's statement states the following:

“To the west of the site is a public pathway that leads to Chatsworth Avenue to the south. Due to the setting of the site in relation to this path, the property acts

as a landmark within this area of Reading Road and as such can take on a character of its own.”

The LPA do not agree that the property is a landmark simply due to its presence from the adjacent footpath. It exhibits no unique or legible characteristics and currently assimilates into the character of the area, exhibiting similar features to other nearby properties. Referring to R1 of the Borough Design Guide, distinctive identities can be created providing a site is large enough, but it also must relate well to the existing character. The limited spatial constraints of this site prevent this from occurring, and the anomalous height of the buildings does not relate well to the existing locale.

Lastly, paragraph 3.17 of the Appellant's statement refers to the existing vegetation that is present on the site's frontage and rear garden boundaries. Vegetation should not be used to screen poorly designed schemes, rather it should be used to enhance good design. Furthermore, vegetation cannot be relied on in perpetuity to screen developments as it can be easily removed without the need for permission or could potentially die (with no obligation to replace). Additionally, additional vegetation would not hide the overall scale and height.

Overall, it is clear that the proposed development fails to comply with A.2 (e) as the external appearance of the building would fail to maintain the quality of the environment by reason of its excessive scale/height in a narrow residential plot, contrary to policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy 2010, the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2012 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Overbearing impacts onto nos. 508 and 512 Reading Road:

Similar to Reason for Refusal 1, the Appellant has referred to the fact that specific chapters/paragraphs within the Borough Design Guide and National Planning Policy Framework are not referenced within Reason for Refusal 2.

R23 of the Borough Design Guide, as referenced above, requires extensions and alterations to buildings to relate well to neighbouring properties. Section f of paragraph

135 of the NPPF sets out that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments provide a high standard of amenity for both existing and future users. The LPA agrees with the Appellant that that this also covers neighbouring properties, not just the current and future occupants of the Appeal site.

The Appellant asserts that the additional height from the additional storey would not be considered to trigger adverse harm in comparison, taking account that the relevant side elevations of these properties are not primary vantage points for the occupants. What the Appellant fails to consider is the fact that the Appeal building is legibly set back from the neighbouring properties.

The existing building maintains separation distances between 0.4 and 1.2 metres from the boundary with no.508 and combined with the setback, views of the property from no.508's primary rear amenity space (the patio adjacent to the rear elevation of the dwelling) are plentiful. The substantial increase of the massing of the building within almost immediate proximity to no.508's primary rear amenity space would detrimentally impact the enjoyment of it, to the detriment of the occupier's amenities (see aerial image below). From the LPA's perspective, the increased height of the building would have a towering presence onto no.508, mainly due to the fact that the building would be over two times the height of the adjacent bungalow.



Turning to no.512 Reading Road, due to the setback of no.510, views of its western side elevation visually dominate almost all views to the east of no.512's garden (see aerial image below).



The impact of the appeal scheme's additional massing within proximity to the site boundary would have an adverse overbearing impact on the amenities of no.512 Reading Road, creating an unacceptable sense of enclosure that would be to the detriment of their amenities. The presence of the public footpath between the two properties is noted, but the 4-metre separation distance is not considered sufficient enough to mitigate the impacts of the additional massing due to the site's spatial context.

Conclusion:

In summary, both this statement and the Officer Report adequately outline how the Appeal scheme fails to comply with requirements A.2 (e) and (g) as the building would cause adverse visual harm to the character of the area and would cause adverse overbearing impacts onto the adjacent nos.508 Reading Road and 512 Reading Road, to the detriment of their amenities.

In light of the above, the Inspector is politely requested to dismiss this Appeal.

Yours sincerely,

Kieran Neumann B.A. (Hons), MSc.

Senior Planning Officer