



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 July 2024

by **A Hickey MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4th September 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/W/23/3335968

2, 2A, 6, 6A High Street, Steventon, Abingdon, OX13 6RS

- 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 Mr Andrew Durkin of Saxonville Ltd against the decision of Vale of White Horse District Council.
 - The application Ref is P22/V1425/FUL.
 - The development proposed is retention of the single storey barn, demolition of other existing buildings, and mixed use redevelopment comprise erection of a 3-storey building to the rear, a 2.5 storey building fronting the High Street and a single storey extension to the barn to provide no.13 x residential units (Class C3) and no.2 x Commercial, Business and Service (Use Class E) units, ancillary floorspace, car parking, cycle parking, landscaping, refuse and recycling storage and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was revised during the appeal. Both parties, within their respective submissions, had an opportunity to comment on the revised Framework. Where comments were received, I have taken them into account in my reasoning.
3. Attention has been drawn to an emerging Neighbourhood Plan. However, this appears at an early stage of preparation, and there are likely to be unresolved matters such that this emerging plan attracts very limited weight.
4. The Council have undertaken re-consultation due to the appeal site's location within the Steventon Conservation Area (SCA). Where comments have been received, I have taken these into consideration within my reasoning. The appellant has also had the opportunity to comment as part of the appeal process.
5. At the appeal stage, the appellant provided an amended version of the 'floor plan drawing' (plan: A03-210 Rev B) to correct a discrepancy with the determined site layout (plan: A-020110 Rev C). The proposed car parking spaces are shown on the site layout plan. As such, the amended plan does not change the development applied for, and I am satisfied that no party would be unfairly prejudiced by my considering this plan. I have determined the appeal accordingly and used this amended plan in reaching my decision on this appeal.
6. The Council's third reason for refusal related to the lack of a satisfactory planning obligation. Following an initial objection to the submitted obligation

during the appeal process, a revised Unilateral Undertaking (UU) dated 30 April 2024 was provided. This corrected concerns related to clause 5.13 and Third Schedule paragraph 5.1. The Council have confirmed that following the submission of the revised UU, they have no further comments to make on its acceptability to overcome the third reason for refusal. Therefore, I have dealt with the appeal on the basis that the Council no longer wishes to defend the third reason for refusal.

Main Issues

7. In view of the above, the main issues are:

- the functionality of the site with regard to vehicular parking, turning and highway safety; and
- the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, including the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the SCA.

Reasons

Functionality and highway safety

8. The level of residential parking provision is compliant with the standards of Oxfordshire County Council's 'Parking Standards for New Developments' document, as it does not set a minimum standard. Nonetheless, the Council dispute the required level of parking to be provided in that the locational context of the site and its surroundings should be considered.
9. From my observations and the evidence presented, Steventon benefits from access to a range of shops and services. The appeal site is also located close to bus stops, providing frequent access to Didcot and Oxford. Given the access to these nearby shops and services alongside regular public transport, there is no convincing evidence that a greater level of parking should be provided or that all trips would need multipurpose trips. While future occupiers are unlikely to walk Milton Park or cycle longer distances, including during winter months, they would nonetheless have access to alternative modes of transport for employment opportunities and to access a broader range of services and facilities.
10. However, as set out within paragraph 135 of the Framework, developments should function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development. As such, a well-designed and functional development goes beyond allocating the correct number of designated parking spaces within a layout.
11. At my site visit, which I appreciate is only a snapshot in time, I observed a steady number of motor vehicles, including cars and vans, passing the site. The steady flow was from both directions along High Street, including vehicles entering and exiting the car park for the adjacent Co-op building. In this location, an expansive footway was partially used by a delivery van serving the Co-op building. Unrestricted on-street parking was available on High Street via a layby.
12. In contrast to High Street, I also observed that The Causeway was narrower but lighter trafficked with on-street parking. Houses facing the road had a short

- setback, with front gardens being used for parking. I also observed a parked car located on the access route, blocking any potential access or egress.
13. The appellant has sought to address concerns raised by the Council with vehicle manoeuvrers within the site through the introduction of turntables. In principle, the use of a turntable system would allow vehicles to turn within the site. The larger, more centrally located turntable would be mainly used for servicing and deliveries to the commercial units. This would allow goods vehicles equal to 7.5 tonnes to enter and leave the site in forward gear. The site layout plan indicates loading and deliveries would be restricted to 10 mins. The smaller turntable would serve vehicles at the back end of the site.
 14. In the case of the appeal scheme, there would be circumstances where manoeuvring would take place in the immediate vicinity of the bike or bin stores and walking routes.
 15. In the event of mechanical failure of the smaller turntable vehicles parking in bays 08 to 09 would not be able to turn within the site. At such times, drivers would have to undertake reversing manoeuvres within a constrained site with limited visibility that would be prejudicial to highway safety. Additionally, should a car become stranded on the turntable, this would restrict access to the flats and bike store hindering the free flow of pedestrians and cyclists. It is also unclear if parked vehicles using bays 05 to 07 would be able to turn within the site should a car become stuck on the turntable.
 16. Although perhaps an unlikely occurrence should the larger turntable fail, this would have serious implications for how good vehicles and other larger vehicles service and egress the site. Larger vehicles would need to reverse onto The Causeway which would be prejudicial to highway safety and the free flow of traffic.
 17. The positioning of the larger turntable, in combination with servicing arrangements for the commercial premises, would also interact with vehicles entering or exiting High Street. In the event of a delivery or breakdown, vehicles would be prevented from entering the site from High Street or leaving from the rear of the site. This would in turn likely lead to vehicles waiting or parking in the access way or reversing onto the highway. These parking, waiting, or reversing vehicles would cause obstructions, restricting the movement of vehicles within the site and on High Street and, therefore, causing a conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, which would be harmful to highway safety. This would also result in a severe impact on the free flow of traffic.
 18. My attention has been drawn to an extant permission (P21/V0140/FUL). While I do not have full details, the approved scheme did not incorporate turntables within its layout and was not for the same development. It is therefore materially different to the appeal scheme. There also remains a dispute between the main parties regarding vehicle trip generation. Even if I were to accept a lower number of vehicular trips, this would not overcome the harms I have identified above.
 19. Consequently, the site would not function well with regard to vehicular parking and turning, resulting in highway safety impacts. The proposal would, therefore conflict with Core Policies 33 and 35 of The Vale of the White Horse Local Plan Part 1 (LPP1) and Development Policy 15 of The Vale of the White Horse Local

Plan Part 2 (LPP2). These seek amongst other things, that the impacts of new development on the local road network are minimised and adequate provision is made for loading, unloading, circulation, servicing and vehicle turning. For similar reasons, the proposal also conflicts with the Framework in so far as it seeks developments to function well and minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

Character and appearance

20. The majority of the appeal site is located within the SCA. As such, I have had regard to the duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing its character or appearance. The significance of this part of the SCA is characterised by the linear pattern of development with historical properties of varying ages and styles set at varying distances fronting the street.
21. The appeal site comprises an irregularly shaped parcel of land containing a number of empty buildings of varying heights and designs. Access to the site is taken from High Street or The Causeway. The prominent Co-op building is situated adjacent to the appeal site fronting High Street. The brick and part timber-clad Co-op building is formed of three two-storey gables, which reduce to one and a half storeys closest to the boundary with the appeal site.
22. The proposed building fronting High Street would be taller than the one-and-a-half-storey element of the Co-op building. It would also be of a different style, incorporating roof dormers. Nonetheless, it would be of comparable height to the ridge line of the Co-op building. As a result of a reduced ridge height closest to the opposite adjoining property (The Whitehouse), the appeal scheme would all be of comparable height to buildings on either side. As such, it would be of appropriate scale to replace the atypical single-storey buildings currently on site.
23. The Council have also raised concerns over the size of the dormer windows to be incorporated on the front elevation facing High Street. The dormers would be visible along short and medium-range views of High Street. However, they would also be seen alongside many other dormers of varying sizes and styles found in the surrounding area. Given the size and positioning of the dormers, they would be neither incongruous nor alien to the street scene or the host building.
24. The development would see a car parking space (parking bay 11) directly in front of a window serving a residential unit. Such an arrangement is not uncommon in the surrounding area. Indeed, similar arrangements are in place close to the access on The Causeway. As such, the position of the parking space in front of a window would be in keeping with other nearby dwellings.
25. The Council have also raised concerns that the amenity area for this property would appear constrained as it would be sited adjacent to the building. The square-shaped garden would be of adequate size and benefit from a living wall. Given the scale of the property, it would be of an appropriate size and design. It would not, therefore appear out of place close to the route through the site and turn table. However, unlike this property's amenity space, there would be less of a defined amenity space for the barn dwelling. The inclusion of a tree within close proximity to the larger turntable would appear cramped within this part of the site. Given this close relationship, there would be little delineation between the outdoor space of the barn and the wider site. This would contrast

- with the prevailing pattern of private and screened amenity spaces found within the area.
26. Future occupiers would have access to nearby green spaces. Nonetheless, this would not overcome the cramped nature of the development overall, with its narrow walkways close to the passing vehicular traffic and parking bays. Moreover, when vehicles are parking or using the turn tables, this would restrict access to the bike and bin stores. The limited opportunities for soft landscaping across the wider site would also be evident. Given the harms I have identified above arise across the site, it is indicative of an overdevelopment of the site.
27. I have identified harm above with regard to the functionality of the site and highway safety. However, the limited increase in parked cars within the surrounding area would not be harmful to its more rural character or appearance.
28. For the purposes of the Framework, the SCA is a designated heritage asset. Within the overall context, I consider that the proposal would, given the buildings it replaces and the location and style of proposed buildings, preserve the character and appearance of the SCA. However, the poor internal layout would nonetheless be harmful to the character and appearance of the immediate area.
29. Consequently, while elements of the scheme would be acceptable, the proposed development as a whole would have a cramped internal layout, resulting in an overdevelopment of the site. It would therefore fail to accord with Core Policies 37 and 38 of the LPP1. These seek, amongst other things, new development that responds positively to the site and its surroundings with well-integrated car and bicycle parking whilst maximising existing and potential movement connections. It would conflict with the Framework, where it seeks to ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area, including the surrounding built environment and maintain a strong sense of place.

Other Matters

30. With the exception of the Parish Council and neighbouring properties, there have been no objections to the proposal from statutory consultees. The absence of objections, however, does not lead me to reach a different conclusion to the detrimental harms I have found above.
31. The appellant has referred to pre-application discussions held with the Council. However, whilst encouraged by the Framework, they do not represent formal planning decisions.
32. The proposal would support development within an existing settlement. The proposal would enable the delivery of an additional 13 dwellings, 3 of which would be affordable units, in an established residential area on a windfall site. The delivery of appropriate levels of market and affordable housing is an important requirement in order to meet the demand for affordable housing and to create mixed and balanced communities.
33. There would also be social and economic benefits associated with employment during construction and from the replacement commercial element of the scheme as well as future occupants buoying up the local economy. There would

also be some environmental benefits by redeveloping underutilised land and empty buildings. I have also taken into consideration that this is a brownfield site within walking distance of local services and facilities and where there is good access to public transport. I attach moderate weight to these benefits. However, in the form proposed, this development would result in the significant harm identified above, and the benefits of the scheme do not justify development that would be contrary to the development plan.

34. I note the appellant's comments with regard to discussions with the Parish Council. However, I must determine the appeal on the basis of the submitted plans.

35. The appellant also states that the proposal accords with many other development plan policies. Nevertheless, this does not overcome the harms identified.

Conclusion

36. For the above reasons, the appeal scheme would conflict with the development plan when considered as a whole. There are no material considerations, individually or cumulatively, worthy of sufficient weight that would indicate a decision other than in accordance with it. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

A Hickey

INSPECTOR