



FAO Ms Naomi Reynard  
North Hertfordshire District Council

6 May 2021

**21/00799/FP: GLADSTONE VILLAS, REED: TWO STOREY REAR EXTENSIONS TO EXISTING DWELLINGS AND ERECTION OF 4 BEDROOM DETACHED HOUSE**

Reed Parish Council objects to this application and asks that it be refused. The main reasons are:

1. it would harm the Reed conservation area, contrary to provisions of NPPF;
2. it would impose an urban level of housing density in this part of the village, unsuited to the rural setting;
3. it would diminish safety on the highway;
4. it does not meet un-addressed housing need in Reed and would adversely impact the amenity of people in this part of the village and in the wider community. It would also affect overstrained infrastructure, notably water supply.

Firstly, though, it is necessary to address erroneous and misleading information contained in the Planning, Design and Access Statement submitted by the applicant.

Repeatedly and in different sections the submitted statement presents information which is wrong or at best misleading about the status and condition of the site of the proposed new dwelling:

- *“The site where the new dwelling is proposed is currently unused” (2.7)*
- *“The site is surrounded on North, South and West boundaries by adjacent dwellings and **open space**” (2.10 - our bold emphasis)*
- The site is a *“disused area of land” (3.1)*
- The proposal would fill in *“a current vacant area of land between dwellings acting as an eyesore” (4.4)*
- The site is *“vacant scrub land” (4.5)*. It is *“disused land” (6.3)*
- It is *“under-utilised land, serving as open scrub land” (6.12)*
- It is claimed the application *“is an example of infill development (6.3).*

All of the above is misleading about the site proposed for the new dwelling. In fact most of the area is a cultivated garden, with lawn, a garden shed and children's play apparatus in situ. It is the garden of 2 Gladstone Villas and has been for fifty years and longer. Following the building of the Kilns development by the same applicant there is no "open space" (2.10) to the N. S. or W. of the site.

It follows that the application is not for an infill development, as claimed at 6.3, but for a back garden development and one which is particularly inappropriate in Reed and in this location for reasons set out below. If permitted here the designation of a garden as "scrubland" or "under-utilised" or "unused" land is one that any house holder could use who was seeking to turn their garden into a building plot, contrary to NPPF 122 (d). Such misleading information embedded in a planning application is at the very least unhelpful and we believe should be material in the determination of the application.

Turning to other substantive objections:

### **1. Harm to heritage value and the Reed Conservation Area**

The proposed development involves a significant addition to the built area in the location proposed. It involves not just the erection of a large, detached house, but also modification and enlargement of the pair of existing Victorian/Edwardian properties known as Gladstone Villas.

It is material that this area of the village has seen extensive recent housing growth with the construction of the Kilns development of 12 dwellings by the same applicant between 2016 and 2018. The Kilns development was supported by Reed Parish Council because, unlike the development in this application, it could be viewed as proportionate to the size of the site; also as an improvement to the semi derelict farmyard on the site. On balance the PC considered the proposal enhanced, rather than harmed, the conservation area, despite reservations about sustainability.

A planning feature in the adopted plan for the Kilns site (following pre-consultation with the village) was the decision to create a break in the layout of houses in an area West of the retained pond. This was to preserve an open aspect across the adjacent field towards the A10. This feature has a deliberate and important effect outside The Kilns at the junction of Jackson's Lane and Brickyard Lane (precisely on the site of the proposed development). Its significance is that it retains an important open view from the junction of Brickyard Lane and Jackson's Lane through the Kilns, to the protected pond-side oak tree and to the large agricultural field beyond. This open aspect achieves some assimilation of the otherwise crowded cluster of buildings in the Kilns development to the rest of the village. It does so by replicating an important and characteristic feature of Reed and its conservation area.

The NHDC Emerging Local Plan describes Reed's "*loose-knit layout, with the fields and open spaces in and around the village forming an important part of the village's character.*" The

significance of this characteristic is also noted by HM Planning Inspectorate in an appeal decision upholding refusal of an earlier application for inappropriate garden development elsewhere in Reed. The inspector in 2016 writes:

*"I accept the view of my colleague in the 2012 appeal that openness is a key attribute of the Conservation Area, particularly in respect of the presence of a meadow in the centre of the village and the generally wide spacing between buildings or groups of buildings."* (APP/X1925/W/16/3147753)

The location of the new dwelling proposed in the application (when combined with significant enlargement of the existing dwellings) would demonstrably harm the conservation area by eliminating a heritage feature (the "key attribute" of "openness") in this area of Reed.

The village geography also gives the site salience and significance with regard to this "key feature" for another reason. The site's position is on the west side of a main junction in the village. The houses near to Gladstone Villas on Hobbs Hayes and Brickyard Lane are a miscellany of post war styles. By contrast, the existing two Gladstone Villas houses, given their period, age and style, are a prominent heritage landmark, especially when viewed towards the west down Jackson's Lane from Reed school. Indeed, the applicant acknowledges the positive contribution of Gladstone Villas in their current setting to the conservation area (4.6), but then proposes to disrupt the setting on which that positive contribution depends.

Jackson's Lane is a road in the village with a heavy footfall, as attested by the fact that it has one of the few runs of pavement in Reed. As the Gladstone Villa houses are approached down the lower part of Jackson's Lane, and as they are viewed from Brickyard Lane, an indispensable attribute of their visual impact is the garden space on their north side. This is space which privileges the period Gladstone Villa dwellings in the streetscape and enhances their presence. The effect is to highlight village heritage in this corner of Reed, especially in juxtaposition to the surrounding modern houses. It is also a space, which, as explained above, provides a 'characteristic' open aspect, so important to the Reed conservation area.

Given, therefore, that a distinctive characteristic of the Reed conservation area is the way the built environment is interspersed with various open aspects in the village which confer the rural 'feel', the application should be refused. Consent would be at odds with stipulations in the NPPF: 2019: 8 (c) ("*contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural built and historic environment*"); 170 (b) ("*conserve and enhance the natural environment*"). Also, 192(b) (the requirement to take account "*of the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities*"). The NPPF enjoins that the wider landscape must be considered in the conservation of a heritage asset. The open aspect which would be eliminated by the proposed new house is at a landmark junction and is the only remaining such open aspect in this corner of the village since the building of The Kilns

development by the same applicant. It follows that both the qualifications (i and ii) to the NPPF paragraph 11 and the presumption in favour of development, apply here. Therefore, for reasons of heritage value and harm to the Reed Conservation Area the application should be refused.

## **2. Overdevelopment and Inappropriate Urban Density in a Rural Location.**

In addition to the points made above, the site is demonstrably too small for the development proposed in this part of the conservation area. Evidence of this is provided by a simple comparison with two nearby 'infill' sites in Reed (one granted and one refused on grounds of degraded design and Highways issues). These are the sites adjacent to 4 Hobbs Hayes and adjacent to 3 Hobbs Hayes, on plots owned or sold on by Settle. Each site was subject to applications for one detached dwelling - 3 or 4 bedroom. Each of the sites for a proposed single dwelling is 700 m sq and 699 m sq respectively. By contrast, the total site area of the two existing Gladstone Villas dwellings plus their gardens, on which enlargement plus an additional detached house is proposed, is 900 m sq. This figure includes the area behind the gardens already abstracted from Gladstone Villas as parking, along with most of the adjacent track to the north of the site which accommodates a footway for pedestrian access to The Kilns houses. On this site of 900 m sq the application proposes to add significant extensions to the existing Gladstone Villas properties as well as a large, detached house with rear extension of comparable size. This would involve an unacceptable encroachment on the new houses behind in The Kilns development, particularly 2 The Kilns, and on the neighbouring property in Brickyard Lane. The portion of the total site available for the new house proposed in the application is at most 420 m sq, depending on how far the Kilns footpath is encroached upon.

This is an inappropriately small space in the rural setting of Reed, especially on this site where the gap currently provided is key to retention of a vital degree of "openness" in this part of the conservation area since the building of The Kilns houses. The present application constitutes over-development and back-garden development which would cause harm to the conservation area. It is also contrary to the NPPF 122(d): "planning decisions should take into account ... *the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens)*".

Also relevant and applicable in this case are the terms in which the LPA refused in January 2020 an application in relation to 1 Coronation Row, Reed:

*"The proposed ... dwelling by reason of its location, would act to diminish the character of this part of the rural area. Such development would act to expand the limit of the linear gain of the settlement by the subdivision of the existing plot. The proposal would therefore be detrimental to the established character and visual amenities of the area contrary to the aims of Saved Policy 6 of the District Local Plan 2 ... and the NPPF."*

The reasons adduced in that case for refusal apply with equal force to the present application.

Another, more recent decision in relation to an application from Settle for land adjacent to 3 Hobbs Hayes Reed is also relevant to the present application. The Settle application was refused by the case officer on design grounds and because of its adverse impact at a sensitive part of the conservation area:

*“By reason of its position between two dwellings in what is a prominent space addressing the village green and cricket ground, the proposed development would occasion harm to the distinctive and spacious feel of the settlement and thereby the significance of the conservation area. This harm would be at the upper end of 'less than substantial' but nevertheless amount to harm to the significance of the heritage asset. This identified harm would render the proposal contrary to the Sect NPPF, specifically paragraphs 130 and 196, and polices HE1 of the Submission Local Plan.”*

Even more than in the case of that application (**20/02012/FP**) the present application (amongst other ill effects) would most emphatically *“occasion harm to the distinctive and spacious feel of the settlement and thereby the significance of the conservation area.”* It does this by proposing over-development and an inappropriate increase in housing density at odds with the village ‘character’, a ‘character’ which the conservation area is intended to protect and preserve.

### **3. Safety**

The Gladstone Villas site sits on a T junction of Brickyard Lane/Hobbs Hays and Jackson’s Lane. As indicated in 1 above, it is a prominent and significant feature in the village streetscape. It is also located on the busiest junction in Reed and on a bus route. It is the intersection of the two main routes into the village, in particular for access to the school, which is situated 200 metres up Jackson’s Lane. The addition of an extra detached dwelling and its associated cars directly on the junction increases hazard for pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Both pedestrian and vehicle usage at the junction has already been increased by The Kilns development. The proposed extra house, and the fact that the proposed off-road parking would deploy directly onto the junction, would decrease safety, especially for cars and pedestrians in the busy school run periods. The off-road parking proposed in the application contributes to the congestion of the site noted as a harm to the conservation area at 1 above. It can be argued that the on-road parking for Gladstone Villas, as at present, opposite the junction, has a traffic calming effect at busy times. Reasons of safety therefore merit refusal of permission for the proposed additional house on the Gladstone Villas garden. Moreover, the negative impact on sustainability from the cars from the additional large, detached house is not offset by any balancing benefit as was the case with The Kilns development in 2014.

#### **4. Housing Need and The Amenity of Neighbours**

The clear negatives in this application, as detailed in 1 - 3 above, are not mitigated by any compelling housing need in Reed which the application would address. Reed's designation as a category A village under the Submitted Local Plan allows for a limited amount of appropriate and sustainable development, something which Reed Parish Council has always accepted. Indeed, there has been steady housing growth in Reed. In 2011 there were 122 houses, in 2020 there are 163, a large growth rate in a village with a First School, but no shop or (as matters stand) pub. In addition there is, under the Emerging Local Plan, an available site in Reed (Rd1) for a future mixed development, including affordable housing.

In the meantime there is continuing, selective development on appropriate small sites in the village. One such site is currently being built out on land adjacent to 4 Hobbs Hayes. Reed Parish Council was able to accept a single-dwelling development on this site because it is proportionate and has a limited impact on the conservation area. By contrast the Parish Council opposed an application for the nearby land adjacent to 3 Hobbs Hayes (**20/02012/FP**) on grounds, amongst others, of inappropriate design and harm to the conservation area. These were grounds, as referenced in 2 above, which were endorsed by the Authority in refusing the application. The proposed new, detached dwelling in the garden of 2 Gladstone Villas merits refusal on the same grounds of harm to the conservation area (see 1 & 2 above). And there is nothing to mitigate this harm. Another expensive, 4-bedroom, detached house, of which, following the completion of The Kilns, there is a plethora in Reed, is not required to meet village housing need.

The effect on the amenity of neighbours is a further reason this application should be refused. Enlarging the two existing houses and packing another large house on the confined site proposed will not only have the general effect of impairing the distinctive 'openness' of the conservation area, but it will also have an immediate encroaching impact on neighbouring properties on Hobbs Hayes, Brickyard Lane and The Kilns. In the case of The Kilns (a development undertaken by the present applicant) the house nearest the preserved pond (no. 2) will suffer significant degraded amenity. Also, the open aspects which were proposed as a design feature at the application stage for The Kilns to justify the overall development, will be negated. The Kilns pedestrian walk-way between Gladstone Villas and Wasdale to the north on Brickyard Lane will be rendered an alleyway and the vital open aspects from the roads (with the heritage value detailed in 1 above) will be entirely lost to the whole community. It should also be noted that the applicant's claim in their supporting statement that an improved pedestrian way from The Kilns would be a benefit of this application is entirely without merit. A properly sealed and landscaped pathway is an obligation on the applicant from the granting of The Kilns application in 2014. That obligation is yet to be fulfilled.

A further objection to the application relates to sustainability and water supply. Houses in the village, particularly in the new and adjacent Kilns development, have consistently suffered from water supply problems for more than a year - low pressure, inability to use showers, toilet cisterns slow filling. Repeated complaints have been registered with Affinity

Water who seem unable to definitively solve the problem since the occupation of the 12 Kilns houses. The addition of another large, detached house in the area can only exacerbate water supply problems without providing compensating benefit to the village or the conservation area.

The applicant also refers in their supporting statement to a modification of their plans following pre-consultation. This is from two new dwellings to one in the garden area. This reduction has no effect in terms of impact on the site or mitigation of harm to the conservation area. The current proposal is for a detached house occupying the same footprint as the two semi-detached dwellings previously canvassed with the Parish Council. It is therefore subject to the same objections in this location as applied to two houses occupying the same space. Such objections - to do with the effect on the conservation area - are detailed in 1 and 2 above.

### **Proposed rear extensions**

Reed Parish Council would not object to an application to create two storey rear extensions of the two existing dwellings at Gladstone Villas. This would be providing the extensions were consonant with the period design of the main houses and there was sympathetic use of suitable materials, as in the case of the nearby Dreadnought Villas. Such a proposal would be proportionate to the size of the site and should not impair the openness crucial to the conservation area at this location. It would allow for provision of off-road parking for the two existing houses on an appropriately un-congested site. If such modifications had the additional effect of continuing to provide housing for agricultural workers in the village that would be a benefit. The improved dwellings would be a more needed housing provision in Reed than yet more high-end private housing. However, the current application is not simply for rear extensions; it is for a detached house as well. As set out above, the combination of such extensions to the existing dwellings with an additional large, detached house is unacceptable and harmful to the conservation area.

### **Conclusion**

The present application should be refused.

It is harmful to the Reed conservation area.

It proposes a density which is unsuitable to this location and the rural setting.

It raises safety and sustainability concerns.

In terms of housing provision, Reed has already experienced an increase in dwellings which mean the village is making a more than proportionate contribution to District housing need. A more appropriate site in the village is currently being built out, consistent with Reed's category A status in the Emergent Local Plan and in that plan there remains a large available site for future development (RD1).

The application contains misleading information about the nature and condition of the proposed site.

For all the above reasons, Reed Parish Council objects to this application and urges the LPA to refuse it.

**KEN LANGLEY**

Chair, Reed Parish Council