
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 13 September 2016

by A Napier BA(Hons) MRTPI MIEMA CEnv

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 05 October 2016

Appeal A Ref: APP/U5360/W/16/3150826

Former Skinners Company School for Girls, 117 Stamford Hill, London N16 5RS

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Harry Hirsch (c/o Beis Rochel d'Satmar School) against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hackney.
 - The application Ref 2015/3460, dated 22 September 2015, was refused by notice dated 15 December 2015.
 - The development proposed is rear gym 20sqm infill extension to 1930's added gym hall.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/U5360/Y/16/3150818

Former Skinners Company School for Girls, 117 Stamford Hill, London N16 5RS

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Harry Hirsch (c/o Beis Rochel d'Satmar School) against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hackney.
 - The application Ref 2015/3501, dated 22 September 2015, was refused by notice dated 15 December 2015.
 - The works proposed are rear gym 20sqm infill extension to 1930's added gym hall.
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Decisions

1. Appeal A and Appeal B are dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Revised plans were submitted as part of the appeals which, from the details provided, detail amendments that were proposed to the Council in writing during the application process. However, there is nothing before me to indicate that these revised drawings were subject to wider consultation, publicity or formally considered by the Council. Therefore, to avoid potential prejudice to the interests of others, I intend to consider the appeals on the basis of the details that were before the Council when it determined the applications.
 3. During my visit to the site, it was apparent that the lower part of a window within the area of the proposed extension had been altered to include a door. The works undertaken to the window differ materially from those indicated on the submitted drawings and whether or not these works required listed building consent is not an issue that is formally before me as part of these appeals, but is a matter for the local planning authority in the first instance. As such, for
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reasons similar to those above, the consideration of this particular matter as part of these appeals would not be necessary or appropriate.

Main Issue

4. The appeal building is a grade II listed building. This is a designated heritage asset and I am mindful of my statutory duties in this regard. The main issue in these appeals is whether or not the proposal would preserve the listed building, any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses, or its setting.

Reasons

5. The appeal building was built in 1889, by the Skinners Company as a school for girls, in response to the increasing demand for girls' education at that time. As such, it is an important part of the history of education provision, particularly in London. The building has remained in educational use as a girls' school since that time and continues to serve the local community following the relocation of the Skinners Company in 2010.
6. From the evidence available to me, including the listing description, I consider that the significance of the appeal building is largely derived from its historic age, form, fabric and particular architectural style and features, including its use of materials and high level of detailing. In addition, its educational origins and continued use as a school are important to its historic character. The setting of the building, within the heart of the local area, also makes an important contribution to its significance. The school occupies a corner location at the junction of Stamford Hill with Northfield Road. This prominent location, together with the imposing scale of the building and its distinctive design, result in it being an important feature within the streetscene.
7. The rear part of the school includes a gymnasium hall and a separate room which, at the time of my visit, was used as a staff room. The hall is relatively modest in size, with several windows and a largely open roof structure. The evidence indicates that it was constructed as a slightly later extension to the main school building, which has been altered subsequently, and it is not a matter of dispute that its design does not reflect that of a modern purpose built sports hall. The proposal seeks to alter and extend the hall, together with the adjacent staff room, to provide an area for equipment storage and for spectators or teachers to stand, without encroaching on the usable space.
8. The proposed extension would be a relatively modest single-storey addition to the building, which would infill an area between two existing projections on the rear elevation. However, although it would not alter the important clerestory window, it would materially disrupt the plan form of the building and detrimentally alter the appearance of its historic rear elevation. The plain design and detailing of the proposed extension would not respond positively to the ornate detailing and distinctive high status character of the west elevation of the existing building.
9. In addition, although the proposal would offer some protection from the weather to the existing external elevation of the building, part of its historic fabric and several important architectural features, such as the upper elements of the windows, stepped brick eaves cornice and ornamental brick pilasters, would be altered, removed or obscured. Furthermore, the pitched roof of the

proposed extension would awkwardly intersect an existing, albeit altered, window opening. As a result, overall, I consider that the impact of the proposal would be materially harmful to the appearance, special interest, historic character and architectural integrity of the listed building.

10. For the reasons given above, I have not formally considered the proposed revisions to the scheme. However, had I done so, I am not satisfied that this alternative proposal would have fully addressed the harm identified. I note too that the proposal would be additional to an earlier approved scheme for an extension to the gymnasium. However, this previous proposal would be materially different in its siting, scale, design and impact to the scheme before me and, as such, does not lead me to alter my findings above.
11. The appeal proposal would extend the building into part of the site that is used as a playground and which is largely enclosed by buildings. As a result, the proposal would be seen in the context of previous extensions to the school and other buildings and structures that exist within the site. Furthermore, due to the proposed siting of the proposal, it would not be readily visible in public views of the site and would not materially affect the important contribution of the listed building to the streetscene. Nonetheless, the existence of previous extensions or other structures within the site does not represent an appropriate reason to undertake harmful works to the listed building and the limited wider visual impact of the proposal would not satisfactorily address this harm.
12. Accordingly, for the reasons given, I conclude that the proposal would not preserve the listed building, but would be materially harmful to its special interest and setting. It would not accord with the *London Plan* Policies 7.4 and 7.8, the *Hackney Core Strategy 2010* (CS) Policies 24 and 25 and the *Hackney Development Management Local Plan 2015* Policies DM1 and DM28, where they collectively seek to protect local character and appearance, including in relation to the historic environment.
13. The proposal would result in harm to the significance of the heritage asset, to which I give great importance and weight. However, it would not lead to the loss of the listed building or the wholesale removal of its important architectural features. As such, I consider that the harm, whilst material, would be less than substantial. Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires that, in the case of designated heritage assets, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.
14. The main public benefits resulting from the scheme would be the provision of a relatively small amount of additional floor space that would support the continued educational use of the building. The proposed extension would enable more of the floorspace of the hall to be put to active use, rather than storage or supervision. However, given the overall design and size of the hall and the appeal scheme, it appears to me that, even with the alterations proposed, the range and type of activities feasible within the space available would be relatively limited. As such, whilst the scheme would no doubt have some functional benefits to the school, from the details provided I am not satisfied that the proposal would significantly improve the facilities available for indoor sports or other activities.
15. Furthermore, there is no substantive evidence before me to demonstrate that the educational use of the building would be at serious risk in the absence of

the proposal. In addition, I am not satisfied that the evidence provided adequately demonstrates that an alternative, potentially less harmful, scheme would not be feasible or viable. I am mindful of CS Policy 12 and paragraphs 72 and 73 of the Framework, and the great weight that should be given to the need to alter schools. However, for the reasons given, I am not satisfied that the need to alter the listed building as proposed has been satisfactorily demonstrated in this case. As such, even taking into account the potential for wider community use of the facility, I consider the overall benefits of the proposal would be relatively modest and give them limited weight.

16. Paragraph 132 of the Framework advises that great weight should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset in considering the impact of a proposal on its significance. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting and, as heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. In addition, paragraph 131 of the Framework refers to the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. For the above reasons, I consider that the development would not make such a contribution and the justification provided is not clear or convincing. Therefore, whilst the use of the site as proposed may be viable, it would not represent its optimum use.
17. For these reasons, I conclude that the benefits of the proposal would not be sufficient to outweigh the harm identified to the significance of the heritage asset and the proposal would not meet the aims of paragraph 17 of the Framework, to achieve high quality design and conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

Other matters

18. Although I understand that positive pre-application advice was provided by the Council's planning officer on the possible extension of the building, this matter does not lead me to alter my findings above.

Conclusions

19. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeals should be dismissed.

A Napier

INSPECTOR