

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 November 2016

by J F Powis BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 8 December 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/H5960/W/16/3156195

993 Garratt Lane, London SW17 0LN

- 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 Asif Ahmad against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Wandsworth.
 - The application Ref 2016/2543, dated 3 May 2016, was refused by notice dated 30 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is conversion of 6 bedroom house into 3 self-contained flats, along with a single storey ground floor extension and first floor extension, also with a rear dormer mansard roof extension with a roof terrace. Associated refuse and cycle storage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. For reasons of clarity, the description of development set out above has been slightly amended from that stated on the application form.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the supply of family-sized dwellings in the area, having regard to the suitability of the appeal property.

Reasons

4. The appeal property is a three storey terraced house on the north side of Garratt Lane. It has a moderate area of flat garden to the rear and was unoccupied at the time of my visit. In determining the application, the Council considered that the extensions and standard of accommodation proposed would be acceptable but that the principle of the sub-division of the house into three residential units would not.
 5. The existing habitable floor space of the appeal property is approximately 145.6 sqm. Policy DMH2(a) of the Wandsworth Local Plan: Development Management Policies Document (adopted March 2016) (DMPD) states that the conversion of dwellings with less than 150 sqm of existing habitable floor space will only be permitted where the property is unsuitable for families. The supporting text to that policy at paragraph 3.6 explains that its intention is to retain family-sized housing with gardens in order to ensure that the housing stock in the area provides a suitable range and choice of accommodation. This echoes Policy IS5 of the Wandsworth Local Plan: Core Strategy (adopted March
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2016) and the requirement in paragraph 50 of the National Planning Policy Framework to deliver a mix of housing types to meet the needs of all parts of the community.

6. The appellant submits that the property is no longer suitable as a family dwelling and that the proposed conversion to three self-contained flats would be a more appropriate use of the site. He also contends that the property is difficult to let due to a cap on rent for 4+ bedroom accommodation and that the proposal would create affordable and viable units of rental accommodation.
7. The supporting text to Policy DMH2(a) at paragraph 3.8 indicates that in determining whether a property is suitable for families, account should be taken of its location. The area immediately surrounding the appeal site is predominately residential in character, with some retail facilities, a primary school and public leisure centre all within easy walking distance.
8. Garratt Lane is a relatively busy thoroughfare and the appeal property is located on a bend in the road and opposite the junction with Gambole Road SW. I note, however, that the pavement to the front of the house is of a moderate width which provides a good level of refuge from vehicular traffic. There is also a small gated courtyard area to the front of the house which provides an additional safeguard from passing traffic for vulnerable people such as children entering and exiting the front of the house. I saw that other properties an equivalent distance from this section of the road were configured as single household dwellings and it is reasonable to expect that they may be occupied by families. Overall, I consider that the proximity of the house to the road does not, in itself, render the house unsuitable for family occupation.
9. The appeal property currently provides six bedrooms over three floors. The appellant submits that this arrangement does not lend itself easily to modern family living. However on my visit, I saw that the layout of the house is not unusual for a family home. The appellant has cited 2013 data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicating that 88% of households in the ward of Tooting comprise 1-4 people. I am mindful that the relationship between household size and housing need is complex and the Council's clear policy aim is to provide a range of housing types to meet all needs.
10. I also saw on my visit that a large number of other nearby terraced properties of comparable size appeared to be in use as single household dwellings. I am therefore not persuaded that the current configuration or size of the house makes it unsuitable for occupation by a family or group of sharers, the latter of which also forms part of the identified housing need identified within paragraph 3.6 of the DMPD.
11. I have had regard to representations that Tooting's housing stock is comprised of a higher proportion of houses than that of the borough as a whole. However I am also mindful of submissions that there are fewer 4+ bed houses or flats in Tooting than in the rest of Wandsworth and that the borough has over 5900 flats under construction but only 150 houses. On the basis of the evidence before me, I am not persuaded that there is any less need to protect houses from conversion to flats in this part of the borough.
12. It has been put to me that flat 1, on the ground floor of the property, would provide a suitable replacement family-sized dwelling with garden for the current house. I acknowledge that flat 1 would provide sufficient internal and

external space to form a small unit of family accommodation. I also accept that the proposed sub-division of the building could be suitable for extended families seeking to be close to one another whilst retaining a degree of independence. However, the proposed flats would provide a significantly different housing offer compared to the current single household dwelling. On balance, I do not consider that the small unit of family accommodation provided at flat 1 would compensate for the loss of a family-sized house in this case.

13. I recognise that if the existing habitable floorspace of the house had been 4.4 sqm greater, the proposal would have been assessed under part (b) of Policy DMH2, and may have been looked upon more favourably. Whilst I accept that the floorspace in this case is close to the 150 sqm defined in the policy, it seems to me that the thresholds are informed by a robust and recent evidence base and as such, should be applied as intended. I consider that it would undermine the clear intent of the policy to allow a relaxation of the threshold where there is no compelling evidence that the house is fundamentally unsuitable for families.
14. Having regard to all of these matters, I conclude that the appeal property is suitable for family occupation. The proposal would result in the loss of this family-sized house in an area of demonstrated need. Consequently, the proposed development would have an adverse effect on the supply of family-sized dwellings in the area. As such, the proposal would be contrary to Policy DMH2 of the Wandsworth DMPD.

Other Matters

Benefits of the proposal

15. The proposed development would provide two net additional and affordable dwellings units in an area well-served by local facilities and public transport links. This would constitute a small contribution to the local supply of housing, bringing social benefits. Flat 1 would make a positive contribution to the provision of 3 bedroom flats in the borough.
16. The proposal would also constitute an efficient use of the site and generate economic benefits in terms of sustaining employment and business activity in the construction sector. These are matters that weigh in favour of the proposal. However, I do not consider that these benefits are sufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified in respect of the main issue in this case.

Conclusions

17. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J F Powis

INSPECTOR