
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 December 2016

by Elaine Gray MA(Hons) MSc IHBC

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

Decision date: 11 January 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/M5450/W/16/3160432

College House, 15 College Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1BY

- 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 Raj Soni against the decision of Council of the London Borough of Harrow.
 - The application Ref P/2771/15, dated 5 June 2015, was refused by notice dated 6 July 2016.
 - The development proposed is addition of two floors for office use with terraced roof areas at front and rear.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for addition of two floors for office use with terraced roof areas at front and rear at College House, 15 College Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1BY in accordance with the terms of the application Ref P/2771/15, dated 5 June 2015, subject to the conditions set out in the schedule to this decision letter.

Preliminary matters

2. The description of the proposed development varies between the application form and the subsequent documents. I have used the description given on the appeal form, as it describes the proposal more clearly.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises a modern red brick office block within Harrow Town Centre, which is a predominantly commercial area. The proposal would create two additional storeys of office accommodation. The Council regards the development of office floorspace in this location as being acceptable in principle, and I agree with that position.
5. In considering the impact of the proposal, I have taken into account the planning permission¹ granted for the redevelopment of the former Harrow Post Office site. The College Road elevations of this development will create blocks of six, seven and eight storeys in height. To the rear, along the railway line,

¹ P/0737/15

significantly taller blocks of up to 20 storeys will be constructed. In the light of the changes this approved development will bring to the character of the wider area, I agree with the Council that redevelopment to provide a building of eight storeys on the appeal site would be acceptable in principle.

6. The Council's concern relates to the detailed design of the proposed additional two storeys. The existing office block at the appeal site is unremarkable in appearance. It is plain in style, with uniform fenestration, and a distinct lack of decoration. In terms of materials, the existing red brick facing is in keeping with the adjacent Barclays Bank, and a number of other buildings in the vicinity.
7. The principle of cladding additional storeys in contrasting materials is an established one, and the upper storey of Barclays Bank is a typical example of this design approach. The contrasting materials of the new development would leave the form of the original building legible, and would add visual interest to its otherwise bland appearance. The proposed fenestration would differ from the style of the existing windows. The new windows would be bigger, giving a lighter appearance to the new upper floors, but they would be arranged to sit symmetrically in line above the columns of windows below. The design would thus respect the rhythm of the existing fenestration, whilst avoiding the slavish repetition of it. The proposed windows on the eighth storey would be shorter than those on the seventh, which would bring a visual resolution to the overall composition of the building.
8. The Council is concerned that the additional storeys would not step in. I note from the plans that the eighth storey would step in very slightly, but the seventh storey would rise directly from the line of the sixth. However, I observed that, with the exception of Barclays Bank, the majority of buildings in the vicinity do not have stepped-in upper storeys. I therefore conclude that it is not a characteristic feature of the immediate area. By not stepping in, the proposal would better reflect the prevailing style of the surrounding buildings.
9. Whilst the development would alter the appeal site in a manner which would be clearly visible within the wider area, I am satisfied that the proposals have adequately responded to the characteristics of the existing building and its surroundings. The appeal scheme would also give rise to the benefit of providing additional office accommodation within a town centre location, which weighs in its favour.
10. I therefore conclude that the proposal would sit acceptably in its spatial and visual context without unduly harming the character or appearance of the surrounding area. It would thus comply with Policy CS 1 of the Harrow Core Strategy (February 2012), insofar as it seeks to ensure that all development shall respond positively to the local context. It would also comply with Policy DM 1 of the Harrow Council Development Management Policies (July 2013), which seeks to achieve a high standard of design. It would further accord with Policy 7.4 of the London Plan (LP, March 2015), which seeks to protect local character, and LP Policy 7.6, insofar as it requires architecture to make a positive contribution to a coherent public realm, streetscape and wider cityscape.
11. Additionally, the proposal would accord with Policy AAP1 of the Harrow and Wealdstone Area Action Plan (HWAAP, 2013), insofar as it seeks to secure

distinctive, high quality and contemporary design, and HWAAP Policy AAP4, which seeks to achieve a high standard of development in Harrow.

Other matters

12. I have taken account of a representation from a neighbour objecting to the scheme on the grounds of increased overlooking and loss of view of the sky. However, 369 Station Road is at an oblique angle to the appeal site, and at a sufficient distance from it that any additional overlooking or effect on views of the sky would not be so harmful as to warrant the withholding of planning permission. I note that the Council has not raised these matters within the reason for refusal, and there is no substantive evidence before me which would lead me to a different conclusion.
13. Concern has also been voiced regarding the impact of the development on the setting of the locally listed buildings on Station Road. Whilst the locally listed buildings and the appeal site may be seen together in wider views from the College Road/Station Road junction, I consider that the separation distance between them would mitigate any unduly harmful impact. Finally, there is no evidence before me to indicate that the development would be used for residential purposes rather than the proposed offices, and so I can give little weight to this matter.

Conditions

14. The Council has suggested a number of planning conditions which I have considered against the relevant advice in the PPG. As a result, I have amended some of them for clarity and brevity.

For certainty, it is necessary that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans. A condition relating to materials is appropriate in the interests of character and appearance. Conditions relating to provisions for servicing and refuse collection, and to secure a Construction Management Plan, are necessary to ensure there are no significant adverse impacts upon surrounding occupiers, or upon the highway.

15. It is essential that the requirements of conditions 3, 4 and 5 are agreed prior to the development commencing to ensure that the development is acceptable in respect of the matters they address. I have omitted the suggested condition relating to the Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings regulations as the development is not proposed to be used for residential purposes.
16. The appellant has requested the amendment of the standard time limit condition from three to five years, to allow for the completion of a nearby development. However, there is no substantive evidence before me of the timescales of that development, or its health and safety implications for the appeal proposal. It is not an unusual or exceptional circumstance for development to be ongoing in the vicinity, and there is no compelling evidence to show that an extension to the standard time limit would be justified in this instance.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons above, and taking all other matters into consideration, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

Elaine Gray

INSPECTOR

SCHEDULE OF CONDITIONS

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 020; 021; 022; 023; 024; 025; 026; 027; 028; 029A; 030A; 031A; 032A; 033A.
- 3) No development shall take place until details regarding servicing and refuse collection have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 4) No development shall take place until a schedule of the materials and specification to be used in the construction of the external surfaces, windows and doors of the extension hereby permitted has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Samples shall be made available on site for inspection. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved materials and details.
- 5) No development shall take place until a Construction Method Statement has been submitted to, and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The Statement shall provide for:
 - Details of timelines for phases and implementation of the development;
 - Demolition method statement;
 - The parking of vehicles of site operatives and visitors;
 - The loading and unloading of plant and materials;
 - The storage of plant and materials used in constructing the development;
 - Measures to control the emission of dust and dirt during construction;
 - A scheme for recycling/disposing of waste resulting from demolition and construction works.

The approved Construction Method Statement shall be adhered to throughout the construction period for the development.