
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 January 2017

by Susan Ashworth BA (Hons) BPL MRTPI

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

Decision date: 17 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/V5570/W/16/3160486

St Stephen's Church, 17 Canonbury Road, London N1 2DF

- 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 St Stephen's Church against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Islington.
 - The application Ref P2016/0809/FUL, dated 2 March 2016, was refused by notice dated 27 April 2016.
 - The development proposed is replacement and refurbishment of front steps and terrace.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the replacement and refurbishment of front steps and terrace at St Stephen's Church, 17 Canonbury Road, London N1 2DF in accordance with the terms of application ref: P2016/0809/FUL, dated 2 March 2016 and subject to the following conditions:
 1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun not later than the expiration of three years since the date of this permission.
 2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the flowing approved plans: Design and Access Statement, 583-G2r, 583-G1d, 583-00a, 583-H2, 583-J30a.

Main Issue

2. The main issues in this case are the effect of the proposal on the special architectural or historic interest of the listed building and, linked to that, whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Canonbury Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. St Stephen's Church is a Grade II Listed Building dating from 1838-9, and rebuilt in 1957. The re-building work incorporated the original, symmetrical, façade which is divided into three-bays by a pair of three-sided buttresses and incorporates twin entrances in the outer bays. The entrances, which are raised above the level of the highway, are served by sets of steps and a concrete terrace. The significance of the listed building lies in its historical development and its architectural detailing.
 4. Under s.66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) I am obliged to have special regard to the desirability of
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- preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest it possesses. Under s.72 (1) there is a duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
5. The proposal is for the removal of the existing steps and their replacement with new stone steps and ramps and a terrace of natural stone flags. The ramps would be enclosed by glass and stainless steel balustrades.
 6. The existing steps are uneven and some of the existing concrete paving is broken. As such, in their present condition, the existing steps make a negative contribution to the character and appearance of the building and wider Conservation Area. I note the Council raises no objection in principle to the replacement of the structure and I agree that the replacement of the existing structure with one of natural materials is a benefit of the proposal.
 7. The proposed increase in the height and size of the steps would be limited and would not therefore have any significant effect on the fabric or detailing of the existing facade. The ramps, which would provide disabled access into the building via both of the front entrance doors, would form an integral part of the composition of the steps and in themselves would not be unduly prominent. The balustrades would be clearly visible at the front of the building but nevertheless, they would be modern, visually lightweight structures that would be read as later additions to the building. Situated to the sides of the frontage and being of a transparent design, they would not significantly obscure the building or its detailing and both of the entrance doors would remain legible from the street.
 8. I have taken into consideration the Council's view that the provision of disabled access, which is a significant benefit of the scheme, could be provided by a single ramp. Be that as it may, it seems to me that a single balustrade would unbalance the symmetrical design and proportions of the front elevation which is a significant component of the special architectural interest of the building.
 9. The site lies adjacent to a long terrace of properties, the frontages of which are enclosed by railings. Similar railings also enclose an area of open space immediately to the north-west of the site. Railings are therefore a common feature of the Conservation Area and in this context the proposal would not constitute visual clutter, albeit that the means of enclosure would be of a different style. The proposed balustrades would be set back slightly from the line of the railings on either side of the building and as such would not be unduly prominent in the street scene. Furthermore, as set out above, given their lightweight appearance, they would respond positively to the existing building and would not adversely affect its positive contribution to the street scene.
 10. As such the development would not harm the special architectural or historic interest of the listed building and would preserve the existing character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Consequently the proposal would be consistent with Policies 7.6 and 7.8 of the London Plan 2015, Policy CS9 of Islington's Core Strategy 2011 and Policies DM 2.1 and DM2.3 of Islington's Development Management Policies 2013 which seek amongst other things, and in various ways, to conserve heritage assets and make a positive contribution to the public realm. Moreover, the proposal would meet the weighty statutory requirements of the Act.

Conditions and Conclusion

11. The Council has suggested conditions on the event of the appeal being allowed, which I have considered. In the interests of proper planning and in order to provide certainty, I have imposed the standard time limit and specified the approved plans.
12. Subject to these conditions, for the reasons outlined above, and taking all other matters raised into account, including support for the proposal from The Canonbury Society, the appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted.

S Ashworth

INSPECTOR