
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 March 2017

by Brendan Lyons BArch MA MRTPI IHBC

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

Decision date: 10 April 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/E5330/D/17/3168254

71 Palmerston Crescent, Plumstead, London SE18 2TT

- 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 Mrs Caroline Grant against the decision of Royal Borough of Greenwich Council.
 - The application Ref 16/3199/F, dated 27 September 2016, was refused by notice dated 15 December 2016.
 - The development proposed is described as: Rear dormer window: panoramic dormer under 40 cubic meters in volume to rear of property, facing out of conservation area, visible to private views only, posing no material harm to the conservation area. No changes will be made to the front of the house outside of permitted development.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The description of development in the heading above is taken from the planning application form. In the Council's decision notice this was altered to: 'Formation of a loft conversion including a rear dormer window and insertion of two roof lights in front roof slope', which is a more concise description of the proposed development. Although the appellant went on to adopt the same description in the planning appeal form, she raises concern that the change was made without her agreement and may have adversely affected consideration of the proposal. I have therefore reverted to the original description for the purposes of the appeal.
3. Concern is also raised about some aspects of the Council's handling of the application and of the designation of extensions to the Plumstead Common Conservation Area. However, the appeal is concerned solely with the judgements made by the Council in reaching its decision, and other concerns relating purely to procedural matters ought to be taken up with the Council in the first instance.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed dormer extension on the character and appearance of the house and of the conservation area.
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Reasons

5. The appeal relates to a two-storey house that forms part of a terrace located in a suburban residential area. The terrace, like much of the nearby housing, appears to date from the mid-nineteenth century, although there are some modern houses and garage courts immediately to the north. The terrace curves to follow the line of Palmerston Crescent, which itself reflects the outline of significantly higher ground to the south, from which the rear of the terrace is dominated by taller houses fronting onto Ennis Road. As a result of the curved layout, the house is slightly wedge-shaped on plan, being narrower at the front than the rear. The terrace lies within the widely-drawn Plumstead Common Conservation Area.
6. It is now proposed to convert the loft to provide an additional bedroom and en-suite bathroom. Permission is sought to add a flat-roofed dormer across the width of the rear roof slope and to insert two roof lights into the front roof slope.
7. Assessment of the appeal proposal is somewhat hampered by a number of discrepancies in the submitted plans. In particular the plans do not provide an accurate representation of the existing rear elevation and chimney, and there are some significant differences between the proposed top floor plan, rear elevation and section with regard to the size and placement of windows and roof lights, and the overall width and height of the dormer¹. However, there is sufficient clarity to be able to judge key impacts of the proposal.
8. In considering proposed development affecting a conservation area, section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the area's character or appearance. Policy guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') confirms the great weight in favour of the conservation of 'designated heritage assets', such as conservation areas. The particular significance of any such assets likely to be affected by a development proposal should be identified and assessed. Any harm should require clear and convincing justification.
9. Policy 7.8 of the London Plan (Consolidated with alterations to 2016) ('LP') and Policy DH3 of the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy with Detailed Policies, adopted 2014 ('CS'), which seek the protection and enhancement of heritage assets in general, are consistent with the statutory duty and the NPPF in this regard, as is CS Policy DH(h) which relates specifically to conservation areas.
10. The Council's Conservation Area Appraisal ('CAA') and Conservation Area Management Strategy ('CAMS'), both published in 2010, pre-date the NPPF but remain relevant as a detailed assessment of the significance of the heritage

¹ The rear elevation as proposed shows both the existing first floor windows and the proposed dormer windows as matching pairs, vertically aligned. In fact, the existing windows differ greatly in size and the proposed loft-level plan shows one very wide bedroom window and one small bathroom window, whose alignment with the windows below is not clear. That plan shows that the proposed dormer would fill virtually the full width of the house between party walls, whereas the proposed rear elevation shows the retention of a strip of the existing roof slope to each side, between the dormer and the top of the party walls. An existing chimney stack on the western party wall is not shown. The proposed section and side elevations show the roof of the dormer at the level of the existing ridge, while the proposed rear elevation suggests that it would be some way lower. The front elevation shows the top of the proposed roof lights at the same level, but the floor plan shows the smaller opening set higher in the roof.

asset. The CAA explains that the special interest of the area lies in the ancient origins of the extensive Common and key buildings and street patterns. Groups of Victorian houses and other buildings that surround the Common contribute to its interest by forming the setting of the key open space.

11. Palmerston Crescent forms a distinct outcrop at the edge of the conservation area, leading off Plum Lane to the south of the Common. The interest of this part of the area as outlined by the CAMS lies in its collection of relatively modest but mostly consistently designed houses, which with the adjoining chapel provide a good illustration of the nineteenth-century development of the area. In my view the characteristic topography and curved street layout add some townscape quality. The houses that make up the curved terrace have been subject to some alteration, with replacement of roof coverings, windows and doors, and several, including the appeal property, having rendered the original brickwork, but the essentially uniform character of the terrace has not been fundamentally compromised.
12. The CAA identifies the roofscape as an important visual characteristic of the area and notes that large roof extensions to houses, even at the rear, have been harmful to the area's character. It advises that small dormer extensions to rear slopes, well set in from the ridge and eaves, can be less damaging.
13. The appeal dormer would replace virtually the entire rear slope of the roof. In my assessment, its box-like shape would be entirely unsympathetic to the original roof form and its extensive size would result in a top-heavy effect that would tend to dominate the rear of the house. The dormer would be significantly harmful to the appearance of the house and of the terrace. The examples of large dormers to be seen to the rear of some of the Ennis Road houses illustrate this effect very well. Mismatched and very wide windows, as shown on the floor plan, would also be detrimental to the appearance of the rear of the house. The use of imitation slate cladding would not mitigate the adverse effect of the dormer's size and shape.
14. I acknowledge that because of the location, there would no clear views of the proposed dormer from public vantage points. However, harm to the character and appearance of the house inevitably has some adverse effect on the character and appearance of the wider area, irrespective of public visibility. In any event, the dormer would be clearly seen from the rear gardens of adjoining houses and from a large number of houses behind, which would be looking down on a large area of flat roof.
15. The Conservation Area Appraisal also advises against the fitting of roof lights on visible front roof slopes, and notes that flush fitting 'conservation' roof lights can be less obtrusive than those that stand proud of the roof slope. In this case, I agree with the Council that the proposal for two roof lights of different sizes and possibly located at different heights on the front roof slope would create a cluttered appearance. Notes on the plans suggest that a standard type of roof light, with an upstand, is indicated rather than a flush type. The proposal would be out of character with the house and would have an adverse effect on its appearance, and on the vista along Palmerston Crescent. The slight benefit of re-roofing in an artificial slate-like material would be outweighed.
16. I note that the appellant now states a willingness to be guided by the Council on the appropriate location, size and design of roof lights. However, the appeal

must be determined on the proposal as submitted. In deciding the application, the Council accepted the argument that roof lights similar to those now proposed could be installed as 'permitted development'. Whether or not these particular roof lights might fall within the 'permitted development' criteria is not a matter to be determined in this appeal, and other avenues exist to establish the lawfulness of proposed development². The roof lights form part of the appeal proposal. The potential for an alternative as 'permitted development' could represent a 'fallback' position, although there is no evidence that the roof lights alone would be likely to be implemented without some further roof extension. But as the adverse effect of the roof lights on the appearance of the house would be the same, the fallback does not provide a compelling argument in favour of allowing the appeal.

17. In summary, I consider that the appeal proposal would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. As the house lies within the conservation area, the effect on the setting of the area is not at issue. The harm to the significance of the heritage asset would be minor, and considerably less than substantial in the terms of the NPPF. But I cannot agree with the appellant that there would be no harm to significance.
18. The NPPF advises that any such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In this case, the appellant has outlined the family's need for additional accommodation and the difficulties involved in moving to a larger house. While I can sympathise with the appellant's situation, I consider that the extra space would be essentially a private benefit. There is no suggestion that the house could not continue in viable residential use in its present form. The harm to heritage significance from alterations of the size and design now proposed would not be outweighed. Other forms of enlargement might address at least some of the occupiers' needs with less adverse impact.
19. The proposal would be contrary to national policy on the conservation of heritage assets and to the heritage protection objectives of LP Policy 7.8 and CS Policies DH3 and DH(h), as well as to the more general design objectives of LP Policies 7.4 and 7.6 and CS Policy DH1 and to the specific design criteria for extensions set by CS Policy DH(a).

Conclusion

20. For the reasons set out above, and having taken all representations into account, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Brendan Lyons

INSPECTOR

² It would be open to the appellant to apply to have the matter determined under section 192 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.