
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 April 2017

by Geoff Underwood BA(Hons) PGDip(Urb Cons) MRTPI IHBC

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

Decision date: 8 May 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/N5660/D/17/3171264
64 Bromfelde Road, London SW4 6PR

- 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 David Skelton against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Lambeth.
 - The application Ref 16/06255/FUL, dated 3 November 2016, was refused by notice dated 23 December 2016.
 - The development proposed is the enlargement of the existing basement to provide ancillary rooms with light wells at the front and rear of the semi-detached dwelling house.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application form is dated 26 April 2016. However, the appellant has confirmed that this was a duplicate of an earlier application form which he re-submitted in November 2016, albeit that the date was not changed. The appeal is against the Council's decision on this later application and I have therefore used the date of receipt cited on the Council's decision notice in the heading above.
3. The appeal has been made in the names of Mr and Mrs David Skelton. However the right of appeal is given to 'the applicant' and the application was made by Mr David Skelton. Therefore the appeal can proceed in his name only which I have used in the heading above.

Main Issues

4. The main issues raised by this appeal are the effect the front light well would have on: i) the character and appearance of the host building and the Sibella Road Conservation Area, a designated heritage asset, and; ii) the living conditions of occupiers of the host property.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal proposal seeks to create an enlarged basement which would include the creation of a light well to the front serving a bay window of similar dimensions and appearance to that which exists to the front of the house. The
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light well would open up part of the forecourt of the property which is currently paved with blocks and used for parking of vehicles.

6. The property is a substantial C19 villa which retains many original features to the front. Although appearing as one of a pair of semi-detached houses, in common with other houses on the north west side of Bromfelde Road it is linked into a terrace by a well set back ground floor element. The group of buildings comprising 62 to 82 (even) Bromfelde Road have a notable degree of consistency in appearance, albeit that there are some minor variations in design and their degree of alteration. The host building make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area both in itself and as part of the distinctive group of buildings of which it is a part.
7. The Sibella Road Conservation Area is predominantly made up of streets lined by groups of large houses of consistent design. Whilst their materials are similar, the design, scale, detailing and form of buildings in each discrete group are varied. This distinctive townscape with its balance of uniformity within, and variation between, these groups makes a positive contribution to the Area's architectural and historic character, and hence its significance.
8. Whilst many of these groups of buildings include lower ground floors which are set below the street level this is not a ubiquitous feature of buildings in the Conservation Area. The group in which the appeal property is situated does not display any such lower ground or basement levels at the front or any associated light wells or similar arrangements. The particular group of buildings are in part characterised the limited degree of elevation of their ground floors display, with only a few steps leading to their front doors and the front bay windows not rising far from the ground, which along with other features and details create a distinctive group within the wider townscape of the Conservation Area.
9. The proposal would be set back from the street and the grille would filter views of the void and extended bay window to a degree. Nevertheless, from those aspects where it would be visible, including through the gates which enclose the forecourt, it would be conspicuous and its size would not be so modest as to make it go unnoticed. Whilst it would at times be obscured by any vehicles parked in front of it or on top of the proposed overlaying grille, this would be intermittent.
10. Furthermore, it would create a fundamentally different arrangement at the front of the building and introduce a feature which does not appear as part of the design of the building or its immediate neighbours. As such it would be at odds with the building's, and the group's, distinctive composition by adding a subterranean dimension to the building's façade. This would depart from the uniformity in character and appearance which exists within the group of buildings and as a result the proposal would be an incongruous alteration in harmful contrast to those adjoining buildings.
11. The appellant considers that the projecting bay 'tower' features on buildings within the group are the primary focus on the façade of buildings in the terrace. Whilst they are notable and prominent features they are not they only elements which contribute to the group's distinctive appearance which is formed by the buildings' composition as a whole. The consistent character of the buildings themselves is less evident in the treatment of forecourts, and gardens where they remain, including their boundary treatments to the front.

However, this more diverse appearance has a limited effect on the overall uniformity of the buildings within the townscape of this part of Bromfelde Road and does not introduce such a degree of variety that would render the proposal less incongruous within the group of buildings.

12. Notwithstanding that its visual effects would be limited to some extent as a result of its size, treatment and relatively discreet location it would have a more considerably harmful effect on the architectural and historic integrity of the building, and on the character of the group and the Conservation Area. The proposal would therefore harm the Conservation Area's character and appearance, the desirability of preserving or enhancing such attributes is something to which I have paid special attention.
13. This harm is a matter to which I have attached considerable importance and weight. However, the harm would be less than substantial due to its localised scale in relation to the whole Conservation Area. These are circumstances where the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires such harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. However, there is no suggestion that there would be any such public benefits which would outweigh this harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset.
14. The proposal would be contrary to Lambeth Local Plan, 2015 (Local Plan) Policies Q5, Q11 and Q22 which seek to sustain and reinforce local distinctiveness, preserve and enhance Conservation Areas' character and appearance and ensure extensions deliver good design. This includes those criteria of Local Plan Policy Q11 which relate specifically to basement alterations and extensions, development it resists where they would harm a locality's character or undermine the appearance of the host building.
15. The appellant points to pairs of buildings at 90 & 92 and 94 & 96 farther up Bromfelde Road which have noticeable partly subterranean lower ground floors. Whilst these pairs share some similar features with the appeal building and its neighbours, both these pairs display considerable differences in size, form and detailing, not least that their lower ground floor or semi-basement features appear as an integral part of their original composition. These, and other building in the vicinity with basements, do not therefore lead me to consider that the proposal would be otherwise acceptable.

Living Conditions

16. The proposed grille would enable vehicles to park on top of, or in close proximity to, the front light well. When doing so they would have the effect of considerably reducing the amount of natural light which could enter the proposed family room. It would also mean that the limited outlook upwards through the grille would be largely blocked.
17. The result would be that the room would be dark during the day and the outlook from the room oppressive in such circumstances. However the room would be one of many habitable rooms within the house. These negative effects would be very limited considered in the context of the whole building and other habitable rooms would be available to the occupiers where such effects would not be experienced.
18. The proposal would consequently not harm the living conditions of the occupiers of the property. The proposal would avoid conflict with the amenity

protection requirements of Local Plan Policy Q2. It would also not be contrary to the Framework's core planning principle of always seeking to secure a good standard of amenity for all occupants of buildings. However, avoidance of harm in this respect would not weigh in favour of the proposal.

Conclusion

19. For the above reasons, and having had regard to all other matters raised, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the host property and the significance of the designated heritage asset, contrary to the development plan and the Framework. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Geoff Underwood

INSPECTOR