
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 May 2017

by Elaine Gray MA(Hons) MSc IHBC

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

Decision date: 17 May 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/H5960/W/17/3167431

Land west of 17 Broadwater Road, London SW17 0DS

- 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 Hilltop Supplies Ltd against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Wandsworth.
 - The application Ref 2016/5729, dated 30 September 2016, was refused by notice dated 25 November 2016.
 - The development proposed is erection of a three storey building (plus basement level) to provide 7 flats (2 x 3-bedroom, 2 x 2-bedroom and 3 x 1-bedroom units), with ground, first and second level balconies at front and rear elevations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The Council's third reason for refusal relates to the lack of a desk-based assessment to address the potential effect of the proposal on the Archaeological Priority Area. However, the Council considers that this reason for refusal could be overcome by the provision of the relevant information, as set out in its informative to the decision notice. The appellant does not dispute this position. Consequently, this matter does not need to be considered in the context of this decision.
3. The main issue is therefore the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is located within an area which comprises terraced housing to the north and west, a grade II listed converted school building to the south-east (named on the list description as the 'Broadway Centre'), and a modern block to the south-west. Immediately to the west of the site is a detached dwelling known as 'The Cottage'. The proposal would create a three-storey building accommodating seven new flats.
5. The appeal site was previously the subject of a planning application¹ for the construction of two 6-bedroomed houses, for which planning permission was granted. The Council has thus previously accepted the principle of residential development on the site, and there is no basis for me to take a different view.

¹ 2014/4539

6. The current development proposal would take a contemporary design approach, which again has been accepted in principle by the Council. Such an approach can often work, providing the new design can successfully be integrated within the existing context. In this case, I accept that the design has attempted to reflect local elements, particularly the local materials and the gabled roofs. However, whilst gables are indeed a feature of the adjacent buildings, they are utilised in very different ways. For example, the Cottage has a single gable on its Broadwater Road elevation and a single gable on its Fishponds Road elevation. In each case, these serve as focal points within the overall design.
7. The Broadway Centre is a much grander building, with a very complex roofscape, incorporating many different elements. On the Broadwater Road elevation, a series of four smaller decorative gables punctuate the roof, giving visual interest but without dominating it. These relate logically to the arrangement of the fenestration below, which draws the eye upwards through the floors towards the roof. The larger central gable is articulated by decorative features, and is flanked on either side by two striking green domes, which form the central focus of the composition.
8. Conversely, the proposed development would feature a three gable motif which would be repeated along the front, side and rear elevations. The gables would be consistent in size, and so would not serve the same function of adding focus and visual interest. Instead, it would result in an incongruous zig-zag effect all the way around the building. This effect would be particularly noticeable in views where two elevations were seen in conjunction with each other.
9. Above the lintel level of the uppermost windows, the elevations would be entirely blank, with no articulation or visual relief. Below, the balconies and the arrangement of fenestration would serve to draw the eye horizontally across the facades. In the absence of any clear vertical emphasis, the building would appear heavy and squat, and would be dominated by the blank, repetitive gables.
10. Drawing these factors together, I find that the development would fail to harmonise with its setting, would appear out of context, and would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area. It would therefore fail to comply with Policy DMS1 of the Wandsworth Local Plan Development Management Policies Document (DMPD, March 2016), insofar as it seeks requires new buildings to ensure a high level of physical integration with their surroundings, and to provide a high quality design that contributes positively to the local spatial character. It would further conflict with DMPD Policy DMH4, which amongst other things, requires new development to reflect local character.
11. The Council also raises concern in respect of the front forecourt of the development, which would incorporate two lightwells, one on either side of the main entrance. Each lightwell would span the distance between the front elevation and the back of the Broadwater Road footpath. The lightwells would be seen in the context of a building of contemporary design, and would be in keeping with its overall aesthetic. Nonetheless, I accept that this arrangement would leave little scope for soft landscaping at the front.
12. The terraced houses in the vicinity have small front gardens which allow for modest amounts of soft landscaping. However, the development would be

much more akin in character to the modern block on the corner of Fishponds Road and Gatton Road. I noted on my visit that this particular development has limited scope for outdoor planting. Therefore, although the lack of land available for landscaping would produce a harder visual impact than that of the surrounding houses, it would not be out of keeping with the overall character of the development. In any case, a small amount of planting could be provided to soften the entrance area. I therefore conclude that this matter in itself would not be so harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding area as to warrant the withholding of planning permission.

Other matters

13. The appellant contends that the scheme would represent an improvement on the approved 2014 scheme, but I disagree. In terms of dimensions and footprint, the proposals would be very similar. However, the 2014 design interprets the strong vertical elements of the Broadwater Centre, such as the towers and the long runs of fenestration, more successfully. I agree that flat roofs are not characteristic of the area, but they would nonetheless be consistent within the aesthetic of the 2014 scheme. The current scheme reflects the domestic gables in the area, but renders them more dominant than is characteristic of the surrounding buildings. Whilst the proposal would utilise hips and tiles, these would appear incongruous with the fully contemporary facades below.
14. I have been referred to Damian Hurst's Newport Street Gallery by way of comparison. I do not know this building, but the appellant has provided a small photograph of it. From what I can see, the context of the gallery appears to be more industrial in character, and it may be that the design of that building relates more successfully to its environs. However, with this limited information, I am unable to give much weight to the comparison.
15. The development would provide seven new units, and so would make a contribution, albeit modest, to the housing supply. However, this small benefit would not be sufficient to outweigh the harm I have identified above. Furthermore, the aim of maximising the potential of the site would not strike an acceptable balance with that harm.
16. Finally, the Council considers that the setting of the Broadwater Centre would not be harmed by the proposed development. I have no basis on which to take a contrary view, and so the statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of the listed building would be satisfied.

Conclusion

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

Elaine Gray

INSPECTOR