
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 May 2017

by Alexander Walker MPlan MRTPI

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

Decision date: 24th May 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/X5990/W/16/3160064

Windsor Castle Pub, 27-29 Crawford Place, London W1H 4LJ

- 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 Manica Properties Ltd against the decision of City of Westminster Council.
 - The application Ref 16/04796/FULL, dated 10 May 2016, was refused by notice dated 5 August 2016.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of first floor dining room and staff bedrooms to 2 bed apartment; conversion of 2nd floor staff bedrooms to 2 bed apartment; single storey extension above existing 2nd floor to create new 2 bed apartment and new butterfly roof; and, formation of new ground floor residential access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposal preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Molyneux Street Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The Council have raised no objection to the proposed change of use of the building. Based on the evidence before me, I find no reason to disagree with this view. The Council's concern centres on the proposed additional floor and the effect it has on the Molyneux Street Conservation Area (the CA). Accordingly, my assessment of the appeal focuses on this matter of contention.
4. The CA is small, encompassing only a few streets, which mainly comprise 19th Century terraces. The uniformity of the design and size of these terraces makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. The appeal property is a three-storey with basement, mid-terrace building that forms part of a terrace row comprising a variety of properties in terms of height and design, which are in marked contrast to the uniformity of neighbouring terraced streets. Nevertheless, the north east section of the terrace, including the appeal property and Nos 31, 31A, 33 and 35 Crawford Place, are of a similar design and size to the neighbouring terrace rows, in particular Molyneux Street, and are all identified as Unlisted Buildings of Merit in the Molyneux Street Conservation Area Audit 2002.

5. The adjoining property to the south west, Gerrard House, is predominantly four storeys in height, although the central element is five storeys. Whilst this is a traditional building, its design and scale is significantly different to those to the north east. It has more intricate detailing including bay window features, brick quoining and uses two different bricks. Furthermore, the window proportions are different. As with the other larger properties to the south east of the terrace, Gerrard House is a standalone building that has been individually designed. In contrast to this, the appeal property forms part of a group of similar properties that create a cohesive link with the neighbouring uniform streets, in particular Molyneux Street. This link is further enhanced by the positioning of this section of the terrace in a prominent position on the junction of Crawford Place and Molyneux Street.
6. The proposed additional floor on the appeal building would increase its height to just below the fourth floor of Gerrard House. I acknowledge the appellant's argument that it would create a better link with the adjoining taller Gerrard House. However, Gerrard House is a prominent building within the streetscene. The lower buildings either side of it, the appeal property and No 21 Crawford Place, emphasise its dominance. The inclusion of an additional floor would significantly diminish the prominent role Gerrard House has in the streetscene and the CA as a whole as the appeal property would begin to compete with it rather than complement it.
7. Furthermore, an additional floor would erode the general uniformity of this group of similar properties. Due to the increase in height, the proposal would significantly increase the bulk of the building and disrupt the existing parapet along this stretch of the terrace row, which would diminish the strength of the parapet and detract from the important role it plays in defining the uniformity of this group of properties. Consequently, this would erode the cohesive link this group has with the properties on Molyneux Street.
8. Whilst the existing railing on the parapet of the appeal property would be removed, which would improve the appearance of the building, given the simplicity of its design and form, its effect on the building is only minimal. Furthermore, I note that the proposed window proportions and roof design would reflect the existing and neighbouring properties. Nevertheless, this does not outweigh the overall harm the proposal would have to the character and appearance of the CA as a result of the increase in the building's height.
9. I appreciate that there are taller buildings within the terrace. However, these do not have such a pivotal role in linking the streets within the CA together as the appeal property and its neighbouring properties do.
10. Paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 134 of the Framework confirms that where a development proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimal viable use. Whilst the harm to the significance of the CA would be less than substantial, I do not find that the contribution the proposal would have to the local housing supply or the utilisation of the previously developed site would outweigh this harm.

11. Therefore I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Molyneux Street Conservation Area, contrary to Policies S25 and S28 of Westminster's City Plan, which state that Westminster's historic environment, including conservation areas, will be conserved and ensure that development incorporates exemplary standards of architecture. Furthermore, it would fail to comply with Saved Policies DES1, DES6 and DES9 of the City of Westminster Unitary Development Plan, which seek to ensure that development is of the highest architectural quality; that roof extensions do not adversely affect the architectural character or unity of a building or group of buildings; and, that development preserves or enhances the character or appearance of conservation areas and their settings.

Conclusion

12. For the reasons given above, having regard to all matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Alexander Walker

INSPECTOR