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# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 July 2017

**by Jonathan Tudor BA (Hons), Solicitor (non-practising)**

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

**Decision date: 01 August 2017**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/L5240/W/17/3173706**  
**5 Sydenham Road, Croydon CR0 2EX**

- 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 Dr Anwar Ansari (AA Homes and Housing) against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Croydon.
  - The application Ref 16/04128/FUL, dated 8 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 12 October 2016.
  - The development proposed is re-cladding with render finish of existing metal panel elevations.
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## Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for re-cladding with render finish of existing metal panel elevations at 5 Sydenham Road, Croydon CR0 2EX in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 16/04128/FUL, dated 8 August 2016, subject to the following conditions:
  - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
  - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: Drawing Nos 01 Site Location Plan; 01 Existing Site Plan; PL 011 Rev A; PL 012 Rev A; PL 013 Rev A; PL 014 Rev A; and PL 015.
  - 3) No above ground works on site shall commence until details of the external facing materials have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall only be implemented in accordance with such approved details.

## Procedural Matter

2. The appellant has submitted four amended plans with the appeal documentation, as the plans submitted with the original planning application also referred to new doors, which have, according to the appellant, already been granted permission under a separate planning consent.<sup>1</sup> The alterations to the plans are minor and the amended plans are intended to more accurately reflect the description and extent of the proposed development. The appellant advises that copies of the plans have been sent to the Council. The Council has, therefore, had the opportunity to comment on them during the course of the appeal. In the circumstances, I consider that no party would be prejudiced

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<sup>1</sup> Ref 14/03813/P

by me accepting the amended plans. I have determined the appeal on that basis.

### **Main Issue**

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the existing building and the area.

### **Reasons**

4. The appeal property is a multi-storey building to the north-west of East Croydon railway station. According to the appellant, it dates from the 1980s and was previously used as an office block but gained prior approval for use as residential flats in 2014.<sup>2</sup> It is located in an area of central Croydon characterised by numerous tall buildings of different scales, types, appearance and uses, including government buildings, hotels, offices and flats. It is proposed to replace the aluminium panels on the building, which is extensively glazed, with a render finish similar to the existing colour.
5. The Council cites a number of policies in its decision notice, including Policy SP4 of the Croydon Local Plan: Strategic Policies (SP).<sup>3</sup> Specifically paragraph SP4.1, which requires that development is of high quality, respects and enhances local character and contributes positively to the public realm, landscape and townscape. Policy UD3 of the Croydon Replacement Unitary Development Plan (UDP)<sup>4</sup>, also listed, indicates that development should respect the height and proportions of surrounding buildings and place emphasis on the design and craftsmanship of architectural features. It should also incorporate established materials used in the locality, although the policy also refers to 'alternative materials' being chosen for their quality and durability.
6. London Plan<sup>5</sup> policies 3.5, 7.1, 7.4 and 7.6, cited in the decision notice, concern quality, local character, regard for the form, function and the structure of an area, place or street and the scale, mass and orientation of surrounding buildings. They require that architecture should make a positive contribution to a coherent public realm, streetscape and wider cityscape whilst incorporating the highest quality materials and design appropriate to its context.
7. The Council asserts that the proposed materials would not be sympathetic to the surroundings and to the existing building(s) and would thereby conflict with those policies. However, the Council Officer's Report provides a limited explanation of how the proposal would specifically conflict with those policies. The building is an existing building and the proposal would not change its scale, height, mass or orientation. With regard to respect for local character, it is accepted in the Officer's Report that the locality is '*characterised by tall buildings in a variety of scales, appearances, styles and uses*', which accords with what I saw on my site visit. The building is sited on a large discrete plot and the other tall buildings along the road are of various designs and materials. The cream colour of the intended render would, according to the appellant, be similar to the existing colour of the aluminium panels, so any change in appearance would be limited. Therefore, given that and the diversity of

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<sup>2</sup> 14/01537/GPDO

<sup>3</sup> Adopted April 2013

<sup>4</sup> Adopted July 2006

<sup>5</sup> The London Plan: The Spatial Development Strategy for London consolidated with alternations since 2011 (March 2016)

- buildings and materials used in the area, the proposal would not be unsympathetic.
8. The Council does express a concern about render over large surface areas being difficult to maintain satisfactorily, leading to deterioration and detriment to the appearance of buildings. However, the appellant submits that the proposed 'Sto' render system is a durable, low maintenance, weather resistant material which avoids the problems associated with traditional cement renders, such as cracking and colour fading. It is also stated that it sheds water naturally and dirt washes from the walls when it rains, thereby resisting the growth of algae and fungus and associated discoloration. A supplementary test report has been provided which, on the face of it, supports those claims. As the Council has not questioned that evidence in any detail or provided an alternative technical assessment, I see no reason to take issue with it. In any case, approval of the particular proposed materials could be secured by condition.
  9. Reference is made to the location of the appeal site within the Croydon Opportunity Area Framework and suggests that it is, therefore, particularly important that the development exhibits a good quality of architecture. That is no doubt true but development plan policies require that across the Borough in any event.
  10. It is also suggested by the Council that a change to the external materials should lead to an 'enhancement' of the appearance of the building. It refers to a 'low quality' façade having direct implications for the public realm. However, no clear evidence has been presented to support the contention that the proposal would result in a low quality façade or that it would fail to enhance the building or the area. The appellant submits that the building features its original aluminium cladding, dating from the 1980s, which has had little maintenance and that it would require attention in the near future. Re-cladding with a new material would, according to the appellant, provide a fresh, modern look to accompany its conversion to residential use. Whilst the existing cladding appears to be in reasonable condition at present, I consider that the proposed re-cladding would have no adverse effect and would provide some enhancement.
  11. My attention has also been drawn to a nearby office block at 5 Bedford Park. The appellant advises that it also benefitted from prior approval for use as residential flats<sup>6</sup> and that its modernised facades comprise of a concrete panel material similar in appearance and function to the appeal proposal. Photographs submitted with the appeal support that and are in accord with what I saw on my site visit. It appears from the appeal plans, with their inset material image references, that the appearance of the proposed façade materials would be similar to 5 Bedford Park. Therefore, it appears that similar materials with a comparable effect have been approved in the immediate vicinity.
  12. The Council Officer's report makes a connection between the entrances and ground floor layout of the property and the external facades. However, as stated above, I am given to understand that the alterations to the entrances have been approved under a separate permission and I see no direct connection between those changes and the re-cladding proposal.

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<sup>6</sup> Ref 14/03469/GPDO

13. The above factors lead me to conclude that the proposed development would not harm the character or appearance of the existing building or the area. Neither would it conflict with policy SP4 of the SP, policy UD3 of the UDP or, indeed, policies 3.5, 7.1, 7.4 or 7.6 of the London Plan, which all essentially seek to ensure high quality design and materials which respect and enhance local character and appearance, as described in more detail above.

### **Conditions**

14. The Council has suggested conditions which I have considered, making minor amendments if necessary, to ensure compliance with the tests contained in the Planning Practice Guidance. A condition setting a time limit for the commencement of the development is a statutory requirement. It is appropriate that there is a condition requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans for certainty. Although the proposed materials are referred to in the application and plans, a condition relating to the details of external facing materials is necessary for certainty to safeguard the character and appearance of the building and the area.

### **Conclusion**

15. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

*Jonathan Tudor*

INSPECTOR