

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 August 2017

by D Cramond BSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 18 August 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y1945/D/17/3177134
27 Watford Heath, Watford, WD19 4EU

- 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 Paul Ryan against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 17/00403/FULH, dated 24 March 2017, was refused by notice dated 22 May 2017.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of existing rear extensions, and erection of part single and two storey extensions to the side and rear.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host property and the locality.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal property is a very attractive two storey semi-detached dwelling with outbuildings on a sizeable plot. It was constructed with a range of materials and architectural detailing which are reflective of other local properties that are in this locality around Watford Heath. The adjoining semi-detached home would have originally been a symmetrical mirrored match but has been considerably extended. The appeal dwelling has open land to the rear and is a Building of Local Interest. Along with other properties, spaces and landscape locally, it contributes to a scene of established semi-rural character and exceptionally pleasing appearance. The relatively extensive proposal is as described above and would primarily provide for additional living and family recreational space, bedroom accommodation and a granny annex.
 4. The site lies within the Watford Heath Conservation Area. There is a duty imposed by Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requiring decision makers to have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. Policy UD2 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31 (CS) broadly reflects this.
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5. Extension of virtually any property, but particularly of a highly valued one such as in this appeal case, should embody a sense of subtlety and appropriate scale with good design being utilised to display harmony and respect to existing detail and with a sense of subordination all to the fore. Regrettably the appeal scheme would not display such characteristics. The side extension by reason of its design, scale and position would dominate the frontage of what is a cottage style of building and the roof form would become unduly extended and incongruous. The same element would remove rich detailing from the existing side elevation and replace views of this with a relatively plain, dominant and largely unrelated new structure. The proposed rear two storey extension would simply and unsympathetically 'swamp' the original cottage style rear by reason of sheer scale, a lack of design finesse, and unrelated roof arrangements and gable formation.
6. In sum the extended form would be disproportionate, overly bulky and would lack suitable detailing and represent poor design which I could not condone. Furthermore whilst there is a degree of landscape screening as highlighted by the Appellant there are certainly vantage points where views through the garden add positively local ambience and it is clearly the case that much of the ungainly planned works would be visible looking towards the site from a number of directions. In addition the outbuilding to be demolished is one which retains original architectural character and makes a positive contribution to the ensemble and consequently its loss would be hard to sanction in this context.
7. I would underline that I entirely understand why the Appellant would a) cite and seek to replicate the works that have been carried out at the adjoining No 26 and b) would highlight that extension to the proximate No 28 has also been allowed. The considerable extending of No 26 would appear to largely stem from post Conservation Area designation and so this cannot be used as differentiation by the Council. However I have to consider matters under the present local and national policy base. The 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) makes it clear that great weight should be given to a designated heritage asset's conservation. I do not know the full decision making process within the Council in the past or the complete policy circumstances which applied before the Framework in 2012 or adoption of the CS in 2013 but in the current context I am certainly not persuaded that the large scale changes at No 26 should be replicated when they do not contribute positively to the scene and to a considerable degree subsume the original characterful dwelling. Meanwhile the works at No 28, approved in 2013, are very different from those proposed. In any event I must determine the appeal case on its own merits.
8. As a final point, the proposal would be sited close to trees, and within the root protection zone, of a large Pine. This tree contributes very significantly to the aesthetic qualities of the site and the Conservation Area. Notwithstanding the case made by the Appellant, and the supporting material lodged, I would not be content to deal with protection of this tree via requirements imposed through a planning condition. To my mind there would be an utmost need to protect this tree and others nearby for character and appearance reasons, and bearing in mind proximity, varying ground levels and building options, I would require such feasibility to be demonstrated by site specific evidence provided alongside the development proposal. Furthermore even if technical solutions did indicate practicality I would need to consider very carefully whether the

proximity of the proposed habitable development to the tree group would unduly increase the likelihood of future pressure to remove one of the trees on health and safety grounds.

9. Having regard to all the foregoing I conclude that there would be conflict with S72(1) of the Act and CS Policy UD2; there would not be preservation of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Additionally, the scheme would run contrary to CS Policy UD1 which calls for high quality design which respects and enhances local character having regard to features of historic value and landscape. This policy shares some objectives with those embodied in the Council's Residential Design Guide, wherein more detailed reference is made to planned works having to be respectful of existing built forms and generally needing to display subordination in terms of size and shape.

Other matters

10. I understand the Appellant's wish to provide increased accommodation on this generous plot. I have considered neighbours' specific concerns over amenity but because of relative dispositions of properties I concur with the Appellant and the Council that there would be no undue decline in living conditions arising from the scheme. I have carefully considered all the points raised by the Appellant but these matters do not outweigh the concerns which I have in relation to the main issue identified above.
11. I confirm that policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) have been considered. Key objectives of the Framework are to protect and enhance the qualities of the natural and built environment as well as to safeguard heritage assets; development plan policies which I cite mirror these. The Framework underlines that great weight should be given to a heritage asset's conservation. The appeal proposals which I shall not allow would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset however what public benefits there would be, such as construction employment, would not outweigh this harm. Furthermore there are no other benefits, including to the Appellant, which to my mind would be of a scale to outweigh the harm to the Conservation Area and Building of Local Interest which I have identified.

Overall conclusion

12. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal proposal would have unacceptable adverse effects on the character and appearance of the host property. Accordingly the appeal is dismissed.

D Cramond

INSPECTOR