



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 September 2017

by G D Jones BSc(Hons) DipTP DMS MRTPI

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

Decision date: 21 September 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/C5690/D/17/3180728
14 Benson Road, London SE23 3RJ

- 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 Mrs Gemma Wade against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Lewisham.
 - The application Ref DC/17/101664, dated 17 May 2017, was refused by notice dated 11 July 2017.
 - The development proposed is the creation of two rear dormer windows and two front roof lights.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect that the proposed development would have on the character and appearance of the host building and the surrounding area, including whether it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Forest Hill Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal property is a detached house that is two-storey in scale and located in a predominantly residential area. It is also within Forest Hill Conservation Area (the CA). The CA is comprised of seven Character Areas, as described in the Council's Appraisal document for the CA (the CAA)¹.
4. In respect to the special interest of the CA, among other things, the CAA states that Forest Hill retains areas of high status housing which were built on the higher ground to take full advantage of the many views both towards, and away from, the centre of the capital. It adds that further east, where the ground drops towards the station, are further, more modest dwellings, which together with some purpose built shops provide the commercial core of the settlement, most of which appears to have been built in the later part of the 19th Century. The CAA goes on to say that the CA also encompasses areas of well preserved 19th and 20th Century housing and that some of the streets provide a mixture of building ages and styles that reflect the various stages of development, all of them retaining good detailing and a common building line. From the information before me I have found no reason to disagree.

¹ Forest Hill Conservation Area Appraisal, the Council of the London Borough of Lewisham, July 2010

5. In respect to Benson Road, the CAA states that the buildings are consistent in terms of coherence and architectural quality with those already present in the area, though they are on a more modest scale, being mainly two storeys with gables at first floor level, and that they are built from red brick with sash windows and appear to date from c1880-90. It goes on to say that the buildings are well-detailed and largely original with Gothic Revival details such as foliage decoration to the rendered pilasters which support the window lintels, and similar details to the arch over the recessed front porches. That description is consistent with what I observed when I visited the area.
6. While visiting the area I also observed dormer windows on some of the nearby houses, which are also referred to in the evidence. Such dormer window development is of relevance in terms of how it has an influence on the character and appearance of the area. However, whether or not that development has been granted planning permission by the Council is of limited weight so far as my decision is concerned. This is because I do not know all of the circumstances of these other schemes and, in any event, all planning applications and appeals must be determined on their own, individual merits.
7. The existing rear dormer windows that I refer to above do have an influence of the character and appearance of the area, such that I see no 'in principle' objection to the introduction of such development to the local townscape. However, that is not to say any kind of dormer would necessarily be acceptable or that all properties in the area could acceptably accommodate such development – each would have to be assessed on their merits or otherwise.
8. In this case the proposed rear dormers would be reasonably substantial, particularly in terms of their height relative to the rest of the rear roof plane and especially so in regard to their proximity to the ridge. Consequently, they would appear over-dominant relative to the rear roof form and give the house a rather awkward, top heavy appearance.
9. I acknowledge that thought appears to have been given to reducing the proposal's effect, for instance by setting the dormers in from the side gables, away from the chimney stacks, and also by providing a reasonable gap between them. The choice of facing materials would also be sympathetic in the context of the proposed and consented ground floor rear extension.
10. Nonetheless, for the reasons outlined, the rear dormer windows as proposed would be visually awkward, incongruous additions that would have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the host building and the surrounding area. Consequently, the appeal scheme would have a detrimental effect on the contribution that the appeal property makes to the significance of the CA and would fail to preserve or enhance its character or appearance.
11. Accordingly, in respect to the matters outlined above, the proposed dormer windows would conflict with Policy 15 (High Quality Design) and Policy 16 (Conservation Areas and the Historic Environment) of the Core Strategy 2011 and DM Policy 30 (Urban Design and Local Character), DM Policy 31 (Alterations and Extensions to Existing Buildings), DM Policy 36 (Development Affecting Designated Heritage Assets) of the Development Management Local Plan 2014 and with the aims and objectives of the Residential Standards Supplementary Planning Document 2012.

12. The resulting harm to the CA's significance would be less than substantial in the terms of para 134 of the Framework. Given the statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area, the identified harm carries substantial weight against the proposed development.

Conclusion

13. I have found nothing in the information before me to suggest that there are any public benefits of the proposal, including securing optimum viable use, which would outweigh the identified *less than substantial harm* to the significance of the CA bearing in mind that such harm should be given considerable importance and weight. Consequently, the proposal does not represent sustainable development and the appeal should be dismissed.

G D Jones

INSPECTOR