



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 October 2017

by Christopher Thomas BSc DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 16 November 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/D/17/3180291
29 Austen Road, Guildford, GU1 3NP

- 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 Naazneen Scmittzehe against the decision of Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 17/P/00426, dated 23 February 2017, was refused by notice dated 17 May 2017.
 - The development proposed is part removal of front boundary wall to provide level parking for two cars within the property boundary.
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Procedural Matter

1. In addition to the elements referred to in the description of the proposed development in the relevant bullet point above, the proposal also includes the conversion of the garage to domestic storage and associated external changes, as referred to by the Council on the decision notice. I have proceeded on this basis.

Decision

2. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for proposed garage conversion to domestic storage with associated external changes, removal of part of the front boundary wall to provide road level parking for two cars within the property's boundary at 29 Austen Road, Guildford, GU1 3NP in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 17/P/00426, dated 23 February 2017, 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 approved drawing no. 0201 Rev P2.
 - 3) No development shall take place until details of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development, including the hardstanding, the retaining walls, the timber glazed doors and the Victorian style railings have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the Waterden Road Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The Council accepts that the proposed works would be in keeping with the scale and character of the existing building, and would have no unacceptable impact on the existing parking arrangements of the application site and surrounding area.
5. It is argued by the Council that the proposed loss of the length of front boundary wall to the right of the existing run-in to the property would erode the character of the heritage asset of the Waterden Road Conservation Area (the CA). The Character Appraisal for the Sydney and Austen Road Triangle, which includes the appeal site, was prepared when this part of what is now in the CA was included in the Charlotteville and Warren Road Conservation Area. It draws attention to the wide variety of gates and gateposts, as well as garden walls, which it says are important and should be conserved as an integral and defining part of the public domain of the CA. Specific reference is made to the concern over works which have eroded and continue to erode the character of the CA through the demolition of original garden walls, the loss of green front gardens and the formation of run-ins to provide off-street parking.
6. In the light of the conclusions of the Character Appraisal and despite the relatively short length of front boundary wall (approximately 3m) which it is proposed to remove, I consider there would be a small but noticeable erosion of the character and appearance of the CA. However, I conclude that the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the designated heritage asset, the CA, and I note that this is also the Council's opinion. Nevertheless, I attach considerable importance and weight to the harm which would result.
7. Notwithstanding the loss of front boundary walling I consider the proposal would lead to several changes to the appearance of the front of the property which in combination would be of public benefit in enhancing the character and appearance of the CA.
8. The overall scheme of development proposed would see the replacement with two new timber glazed doors of the existing metal garage door which, I agree with the appellant, has a utilitarian look. This would be a significant improvement in the appearance of the property when viewed from Austen Road. Furthermore, the existing concrete run-in and white rendered retaining walls with drainage holes and railings would be replaced with a paved hardstanding in natural stone. This would be a visual improvement to the property and an enhancement to the character and appearance of the CA. The proposal would also result in the exposure of the original southeast boundary wall with 31 Austen Road following the removal of the raised gravel bed, thereby restoring an original feature which had been lost. The introduction of some Victorian style railings on the new retaining wall would be a small but valuable enhancement to the appearance of the property, visible from the public domain. The proposed exposure over the retained length of the front boundary wall of the original flint and render materials used in its construction would be another valuable enhancement to the appearance of the CA resulting from the scheme.

9. As a consequence of the proposal I also consider there would be a small but important public benefit in the provision of an additional off-street parking space in an area where there is some evidence of peak demand for parking on Austen Road and nearby streets. I have given some weight to this matter because I consider it would enable the CA to function in a slightly better way for the benefit of residents generally and of those who use the businesses and facilities within it.
10. Taken in combination I consider the positive aspects of the proposal I have highlighted would constitute a significant level of public benefit. When balanced against the less than substantial harmful effect of the loss of boundary wall within the street scene I have concluded that the scale of public benefit would be sufficient to outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of the CA.
11. The Council has drawn attention to the predominance in Austen Road and nearby Sydney Road of single run-ins and argues that this pattern should be respected. I have taken this into account but for the reasons I have given I have concluded that in this particular instance the proposal should be permitted.
12. There would therefore be no conflict with Policy HE7 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan 2003 or with Section 12: 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment' of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.
13. I shall therefore allow the appeal. A condition requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans is necessary for the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning. A condition in respect of the approval of materials will protect the character and appearance of the building and safeguard visual amenity.

C Thomas

INSPECTOR