

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 December 2017

by S M Holden BSc MSc CEng MICE TPP FCIHT MRTPI

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

Decision date: 10th January 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/L5240/W/17/3182435

52 George Street, Croydon CR0 1PD

- 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 Shaheena Bhatti against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Croydon.
 - The application Ref 16/05416/FUL, dated 19 October 2016, was refused by notice dated 6 June 2017.
 - The development proposed is alterations and extensions to provide 4 x 2 bedroom and 4 x 1 bedroom flats.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - a) whether or not the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Central Croydon Conservation Area (CCCA), having particular to the regard its effects on Park Street;
 - b) the effect of potential development on adjoining sites on the living conditions of future occupants in relation to outlook.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal property is a four-storey terraced period building on the southern side of George Street. The building is currently vacant but the ground floor is a retail unit and the floors above were previously used as ancillary offices. At the rear there is a three storey projection with a west facing mono-pitched roof. There is a single storey addition at the end of the projection beyond which there is a small open area abutting Park Street. This area is currently used for parking and bin storage.
4. The appeal site lies within the Croydon Central Conservation Area (CCCA). I therefore have a duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that Area. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss requires clear and convincing justification. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) also advises that any harm that is less than substantial must be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal.

5. The CCCA is the commercial and civic heart of Croydon. Much of the medieval street layout has survived and, even with the impact of 20th century buildings, the Area has retained much of its historic fabric. The Area therefore represents the many historic phases of Croydon's economic and social development. It is dominated by the rich legacy of late Victorian commercial buildings in George Street, High Street and North End. Many of the façades are well preserved above a wide variety of modern shopfronts. The rhythm created by the prominent dormers and gables and the intricacy of the architectural detailing on the upper façades fronting George Street are particularly noteworthy. Almost all the buildings display high levels of craftsmanship and are therefore of individual interest as well as having group value. These features make a significant and positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
6. The proposal would include the construction of a Mansard-style roof extension on the existing building, which is noted for its Dutch Gable. However, the extension would be set back 1.5m behind the existing parapet and would not be visible from George Street. It would therefore preserve the most significant features of this part of the Area.
7. However, the Conservation Area extends from George Street to the north side of Park Street. Whilst some of the George Street properties occupy the full depth between these two streets, a number do not. The north side of Park Street is characterised by modern buildings, interspersed with older ones which reflect the industrial heritage of this part of the town centre and small areas of open space used for parking. Glimpses of the rear elevations of the George Street buildings can therefore be seen through gaps between the buildings along Park Street.
8. The rear projection of No 52 can be seen between the Skyview Apartments, a large, modern apartment block immediately to the east of the appeal site, and a rather dilapidated two-storey Victorian building (Nos 29-31). The area to the rear of this building and between Central House (No 21) and the Skyview Apartments is occupied by a haphazard collection of one, two and three-storey extensions and ancillary buildings. Whilst these existing buildings cannot be described as attractive they are, nevertheless, a significant surviving remnant of the former mixed uses and industrial character of the area.
9. In this context the introduction of a narrow, tall extension of considerable depth to the rear of an enlarged No 52 would appear out of proportion with both the existing building and the adjacent George Street properties, including their rear projections and additions. The height and depth of the extension would dominate the rear of No 52, giving the appearance of an almost entirely separate building bolted onto the back. The ridge of the extension would be equal in height to that of the enlarged Mansard roof, rather than appearing subservient to the main building or complimentary to the nearby ancillary buildings. It would therefore be an unacceptably large and bulky addition to a property which primarily relates to the George Street frontage.
10. The height, width, fenestration arrangement and roof design of the proposed extension would not relate effectively to any of the surrounding buildings in Park Street, including the immediately adjacent modern block of flats. The proposal would fail to enhance the Park Street frontage due to its set-back from the street.

11. It would also be too large to integrate satisfactorily with the older buildings immediately to the west of the site. In particular its bulk, height and western elevation, which would be punctuated by numerous windows, would appear out of place so close to, and towering above, the much smaller scale of Nos 29-31 with its brick façade and slate roof. I note that the Council's Central Croydon Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CCCAAMP) identified this adjacent building as one which makes a positive contribution to the Area. Regardless of its current state of repair, a proposal which fails to respect its proportions and features would be harmful to the Conservation Area.
12. Taking all these factors into consideration, I conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of Park Street and the CCCA. The Conservation Area would therefore be neither preserved nor enhanced. The proposal would be contrary to Policies SP4.1, SP4.12 and SP4.13 of the Croydon Local Plan: Strategic Policies (CLP-SP), and saved Policy UC3 of the Croydon Replacement Unitary Development Plan (UDP). These policies, amongst other things, require development to be high quality that respects local character, especially where there are opportunities to enhance Croydon's heritage assets.
13. It would also conflict with Policies 7.4, 7.6, 7.8 and 7.9 of the London Plan which require the design of new development to be of an appropriate proportion and scale, informed by the surrounding historic environment, and recognising the significance of London's heritage assets. In addition it would fail to comply with the CCCAAMP and the Council's Supplementary Planning Document: *Conservation Area General Guidance* (SPD), which suggests that extensions should not disrupt the scale and proportions of the host building. In order to avoid visual dominance of rear extensions, the SPD advises that extensions should be lower than the height of the existing building.
14. Although, in terms of the Framework, the harm I have identified would be less than substantial, it is a significant factor that weighs against the scheme.

Future living conditions

15. The proposed development would include a significant number of windows very close to the shared boundary with No 50 George Street. At present these windows would look out towards the smaller scale rear additions and ancillary buildings at the rear of Nos 48 and 50. However, the outlook from each of the apartments would be adequate to meet the requirements of Policy SP2.6 of the CLP-SP.
16. The CCCAAMP includes a plan of the Mid Croydon Masterplan Area (Map 16). This indicates that the area to the rear of Nos 48-50 George Street and Nos 29-31 Park Street could potentially be an area for redevelopment. I accept that this may be an aspiration, but no other details have been provided. I have no substantive evidence to suggest that such a proposal is currently under consideration.
17. Neither have I been directed to any planning brief for the site nor a specific development plan policy that refers to any potential redevelopment that is likely to take place in the foreseeable future. The possibility of such a redevelopment as part of the Mid Croydon Masterplan therefore cannot be a justification for refusing permission for a development on the appeal site, if it had been acceptable in all other respects.

18. I therefore conclude that the proposal would provide satisfactory living conditions for future occupants in respect of outlook. In this respect the proposal would comply with saved Policies UD2, UD3, UD8 and H2 of the UDP and Policies 3.5, 7.1, 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6 of the London Plan, all of which require new development to provide satisfactory living conditions for future occupants.

Planning balance

19. The Framework seeks to significantly boost the supply of housing and requires local planning authorities to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing sites. The proposal would provide social benefits in the form of eight additional residential units of accommodation in a highly accessible location. The units would provide adequate living conditions for future occupants, as there can be no certainty that the Council's aspiration for future redevelopment of the adjacent site is likely to be implemented in the foreseeable future. These aspects of the development weigh in the scheme's favour.
20. However, I have found that the proposal would conflict with the requirements of the development plan and my statutory duty to preserve or enhance the CCCA. Moreover, any harm to a heritage asset is a matter to which the Courts have indicated I should give considerable weight and importance. Furthermore, there was a lack of any substantive evidence to indicate what level of public benefits could be delivered through an alternative scheme which would be less harmful to this heritage asset.
21. It appears that the Council is currently able to demonstrate a five year supply of housing sites. Whilst this does not preclude the possibility that the proposal could be a sustainable development, any conflict with the development plan carries full weight in my overall assessment of the scheme, as its policies relating to heritage assets are consistent with the advice of the Framework. In my view the limited social benefits of the proposal are therefore outweighed by the significant harm to the Conservation Area.
22. An appeal decision¹ has been brought to my attention where permission for a housing development was granted, even though the Council was able to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing sites. In that particular case the Inspector concluded that the limited harm to the environment was outweighed by the benefits of the additional housing. However, that scheme did not involve any harm to heritage assets. It is therefore not directly comparable with the appeal proposal, which I have determined on its individual merits.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons set out above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan and the benefits arising from the provision of additional homes would not outweigh the harm to the Conservation Area. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR

¹ APP/W1525/W/15/3121603