
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 May 2019

by C Hall BSc MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 July 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/C5690/W/19/3224243

214A Deptford High Street, London SE8 3PR

- 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 Abdul Salam against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Lewisham.
 - The application Ref DC/18/107440, dated 1 June 2018, was refused by notice dated 11 September 2018.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a third floor and three storey part rear extension to convert the existing residential unit on the first and second floors into three self contained flats.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on:
 - the character and appearance of the building and the Deptford High Street Conservation Area; and
 - the living conditions of future occupants with regard to the layout of the internal accommodation and the provision of external amenity space.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal site is a 3-storey, mid-terrace property which includes a vacant retail unit on the ground floor and residential unit above, which is accessed from the High Street. The proposal is for the addition of an extra storey of accommodation at third floor level, a 3-storey rear extension and the conversion of the resultant building into 3 self-contained flats.
 4. Whilst the building is not locally or statutorily listed, it is in the Deptford High Street Conservation Area (DHSCA) and as such benefits from statutory protection under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The character of the Conservation Area derives from the variety of buildings of different styles, ages, forms and heights which reflect the historic, piecemeal rebuilding and restructuring of properties in the locality.
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5. The appeal property, along with the other buildings nearby, plays a role in defining the character of the area, which is part of the Conservation Area's distinctiveness and significance as a designated heritage asset. I have paid special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, as required by section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
6. The appeal property is one of the few lower level buildings in this part of the High Street and has a distinctive vernacular pitched roof form, which together make a distinctive contribution to the street scene and serve as a record of the smaller, older buildings that survive in Deptford and which are important in revealing its historic development. Whilst I acknowledge that the neighbouring properties are taller and that the appeal scheme would essentially replicate the scale and design of the adjoining building to the south, I consider that the increase in ridge height and the loss of the roof form would obscure the scale of the original building when viewed from the local street scene. This would be harmful to the historic significance of the building and the wider heritage asset.
7. The Council is concerned that the appellant's Heritage Statement (HS) does not provide justification for, or demonstrate an understanding of, the loss of the existing building form. Insufficient information has been submitted in respect of the history of this building and its importance and no assessment of the roof structure has been carried out to assess the significance of this element.
8. The HS states that the significance of the site stems from the subtle architectural details on the building's front elevation, however it does not identify any specific detailing. Although it finds that the building is of no particular architectural merit, it does not set out any opinion on what contribution the existing building makes to the character and appearance of the conservation area. No reference is made to the distinctive roof form and whether its loss would be harmful.
9. The HS states that the new additions and general refurbishment work will considerably improve the appearance of the rear of the property. In this regard I acknowledge that the rear of the terraced row in which the appeal property sits is far from uniform or cohesive. This reflects the piecemeal way the area has developed. The buildings have different designs, heights, roof lines and materials. Some have been extended, including the adjoining building to the south which has a substantial rear addition.
10. That said, I consider that insufficient justification has been provided to demonstrate that no harm would arise to the historic significance of the building and the wider heritage asset. While the resultant harm would be less than substantial, the appeal proposals would nevertheless fail to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the building and the DHSCA.
11. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that when considering the impact of a development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The harm to the conservation area would be less than substantial yet any public benefits, for example in the form of energy efficient accommodation and additional housing in an accessible location, do not outweigh the harm identified. This is a matter to which I give considerable importance and weight.

12. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would adversely affect the character and appearance of the building and the DHSCA. This would be contrary to Policies 15 and 16 of the Lewisham Core Strategy June 2011 (CS) and Policies 30, 31, 36 and 37 of the Lewisham Development Management Local Plan November 2014 (LP). These policies relate to good quality design, requiring protection of the character of the district and conservation of the character and appearance of the heritage asset. It would also be inconsistent with the Framework which requires new development to make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Living conditions

13. LP Policy 32 reflects the standards of the London Plan in respect of minimum internal floorspace for new development. The Council is concerned that the studio flats in particular would result in cramped living accommodation with no space for internal wardrobes, cycle storage or storage cupboards. Moreover the Local Authority states that all the units would have sub-standard ceiling heights, none would have access to private outdoor amenity space and the bin store location in the stairwell on the second floor is impractical and inconvenient.
14. Given that the London Plan figures are minimum standards which are intended to act as a benchmark for high design quality, in my view any shortfall is unlikely to be appropriate and the proposal therefore conflicts with the standards in principle. Whilst the plans do show storage space to each of the flats, I consider that the low ceiling heights, lack of cycle storage and private outdoor amenity space and poorly located bin store cumulatively demonstrate an overdevelopment of the site, and that the layout of the scheme would result in a cramped environment for future occupants.
15. I note that sunlight, daylight and ventilation levels would be acceptable and there would be no adverse harm to the living conditions of neighbouring properties. However these arguments do not outweigh the harm to the living conditions of future occupants that I have identified above.
16. I therefore conclude that the scheme would result in harm to the living conditions of future occupants with regard to the layout of the internal accommodation and the lack external amenity space. This would be contrary to Policy 32 of the LP and Policy 3.5 of the London Plan 2016, which seek to ensure that new residential development are of a high standard of design and layout to meet the functional requirements of future residents.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

C Hall

INSPECTOR