



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 January 2020

by Mr Kim Bennett BSc DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10th February 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/K2230/W/19/3228620
188 Parrock Street, Gravesend DA12 1EN

- 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 Rik Trivedi against the decision of Gravesham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20181117, dated 23 October 2018, was refused by notice dated 28 February 2019.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of the basement into a one bedroom self-contained flat with internal and external alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. An application for listed building consent was made at the same time as the current proposal using a single form. Listed Building Consent was also refused by the Council on 28 February 2019¹ but no appeal was lodged against that decision. Accordingly, the current appeal is in respect of the application for planning permission only.
3. The description of development on the application form referred only to the internal alterations. I have therefore used the Council's description of development as it appears on its decision notice in my formal decision above, as it more accurately describes the extent of development requiring planning permission.
4. The proposal involves a listed building and is in a Conservation Area. As such I have had special regard to sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) and have determined the appeal in accordance with those provisions.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are: first, the effect of the proposal on the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building; second, whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area; and third, whether the proposal would provide satisfactory living conditions for future occupants.

¹ Application Reference 20181118

Reasons

Listed building and Conservation Area considerations

6. No 188 Parrock Street is a C19 Grade II listed building located on the eastern side of the road. It is three storeys in height plus a basement, and forms part of a terrace of similar properties all of which are also Grade II listed. The property is currently vacant but was previously in use as an Estate Agents. At some stage external access to the basement from the front was sealed off and the forecourt concreted over to provide an open surfaced area level with the adjoining footpath.
7. The proposal involves the conversion of the basement to a one bedroom self-contained flat, including internal alterations. Internal access to the ground floor would be sealed off and the former access from the front would be opened up by removing the concrete covering at street level and reinstatement of railings around the reformed lower forecourt area. However, instead of reusing the existing steps, the adjoining front part of the basement wall with No 189 Parrock Street would be demolished so that access would be via the lower forecourt area that currently serves both No 189 and No 190.
8. Externally, the significance of the building lies with its group value as part of the terrace of Nos 188-192 Parrock Street, all of which date from 1869 and are of similar design. There is also evidence in the terrace that each property would have had access to the basement from the front via steps to a lower forecourt with railings at street level. However, this has been altered in the case of Nos 189 and 190 and as referred to above, removed altogether in respect of the appeal property. Internally, the significance of the basement area derives from its historic layout in terms of two rooms, each with its own chimney breast. The rear room is accessed internally via stairs to the ground floor, whilst the front room was accessed via external steps which are still in existence beneath the concrete covering.
9. The proposed works would involve removal of historic fabric, including the internal and external steps, both chimney breasts (one of which is currently boxed in), internal partitions and most of the internal dividing wall between the two original rooms. Apart from loss of historic fabric itself, the works would also result in loss of legibility and understanding of the basement area and its relationship with the rest of the building, because of the removal of historic access and loss of original internal spaces and plan form. Additionally, the loss of individual external steps to the basement area, and the proposal to share access with Nos 189 and 190, would further erode the historic character of the building and its relationship with the adjoining terrace.
10. Although the appellant refers to similar internal works apparently having been carried out in the adjoining properties Nos 189 and 190, the details are not before me and I have reached my findings above based on the site circumstances of this particular case.
11. A combination of the above issues would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building.
12. The site forms part of the King Street Conservation Area. The internal alterations to the listed building would not impact upon the wider Conservation Area. However as referred to above, the proposed external alterations at the

front, particularly the loss of individual access to the property, would reduce the legibility of the historic layout, the integrity of the listed building and its relationship with the wider terrace. The character and appearance of the Conservation Area would not be preserved as a result.

13. The harm caused would be less than substantial and under such circumstances, paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework directs that such harm should be weighed against any public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. In that regard, the reinstatement of the front boundary wall, lower forecourt and railings would restore some of the former character of the building, albeit that I note that the Council considers that the proposed alignment of front railings would not be on the historic alignment. Nonetheless, any benefit would be diminished by the removal of the individual external steps to No 188 and overall would be outweighed by the extent of loss of historic fabric and internal understanding of the basement area. Whilst the addition of one residential unit could also be considered a public benefit it would be a very modest increase to housing land supply and would similarly be outweighed by the harm identified above. It follows that the proposal fails to comply with national policy outlined in the Framework.
14. In finding that there would be harm to the listed building and the Conservation Area, there would also be conflict with Policies CS19 and CS20 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 (CS) and Saved Policies TC2 and TC3 of the Gravesham Local Plan First Review, which amongst other criteria, seek to protect the character of the historic environment and in particular, maintain the integrity of listed buildings.

Living conditions

15. The only natural light to the proposed dwelling would be from a comparatively small window at the front of the flat, which would be at lower ground level. The bedroom area would be furthest from that but given the overall limited size of the proposed unit there would be a lack of light for a large proportion of it. In my view there would be inadequate levels of natural daylight and ventilation for future occupiers as a result, leading to poor living conditions. There would also be very limited sunlight, if any, for the greater part of the day.
16. The lack of natural light alone would make the proposed development unacceptable, but I also note that the layout clearly shows a double bed which makes it capable of being occupied by two persons. Even with a proposed floorspace of 37 sq. m, that would result in relatively cramped accommodation which would be unlikely to provide acceptable levels of internal space.
17. I acknowledge that the adjoining flats at Nos 189 and 190 provide apparently similar accommodation and are also only served by one window each. However, as the Council points out, they were permitted in 2008 and prior to the adoption of both the Core Strategy and publication of the Technical Housing Standards. They are not therefore a good reason to permit a further unit of accommodation which in my view would provide poor living conditions for future occupiers. As such there would be conflict with Policy CS19 of the CS, which seeks to safeguard the amenity of occupants of new development.

Other Matters

18. The Council advises that the site lies within 6 kilometres of the Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) which is also listed as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention (Ramsar Site). As such screening for an Appropriate Assessment under the Habitat Regulations would be required to determine if there would be any significant effect on the designated site.
19. The Council advises no such screening has been carried out. Whilst I note that the appellant takes issue with the need for screening and that mitigation was not requested by the Council, they are not matters I need to give further consideration to given that I am dismissing the appeal for other reasons.
20. I note that the operators of the adjoining Doctor's surgery are most concerned that there would be a reduction in the width of the pavement as a result of the reinstatement of the railings and lower forecourt area. However, that would not be the case as the proposal would not impinge upon the adjoining public footpath and all works would be contained within the forecourt area. Access to the surgery via its existing steps or ramp would be unaffected. This matter does not therefore add to my concerns.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters raised, the proposal would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building, would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and would not provide satisfactory living conditions for future occupiers.
22. Accordingly, the appeal should be dismissed.

Kim Bennett

INSPECTOR