

Appeal Decision

by Graeme Robbie BA(Hons) BPI MRTPI

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

Decision date: 7 May 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/E5900/D/20/3245991

4 St Lawrence Cottages, St Lawrence Street, London E14 9QR

- 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 Turan Karamanoglu against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.
 - The application Ref PA/19/02664, dated 4 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 17 January 2020.
 - The development proposed is a 2.3 metre single storey extension to the rear of the property.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. In response to travel restrictions currently in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic I consider that this appeal can be determined without the need for a physical site visit. This is because I have been able to reach a decision based on the information already available, supplemented by additional evidence supplied by the appellant and confirmed as being accurate by the Council. Both the appellant and the Council have been given an opportunity to provide comments on this approach and I have taken any responses into account.
3. I have noted the initial confusion regarding the appeal site address and have referred to the subsequently agreed address in the banner heading, above.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the host building and the surrounding area.

Reasons

5. The appeal property is one of five broadly similar terraced properties on St Lawrence Street. The terrace is split into two blocks of three dwellings, the sixth being a more recent addition to the end of the block within which the appeal property lies. The Council describe St Lawrence Cottages as an early example of Council housing which, although modernised and in part extended, retain a characterful and broadly uniform appearance and are noted as being local listed buildings. The appeal property's status as a non-designated heritage asset is not disputed by the appellant.
6. At the rear, where the proposed extension would be located, No. 4 has previously been extended by way of a modest single storey, lean-to roofed extension. This extension, and a similar looking single storey lean-to extension

- at the rear of No. 6, provide the only exceptions to the otherwise simple rear façade and consistent unaltered proportions of the rear of the terrace.
7. However, even in the context of the St Lawrence Cottages' relatively secluded and private rear face, the boxy, flat-roofed single storey extension proposed in this instance would be an incongruous addition to the rear of both No. 4, and within the terrace as a whole. The angular appearance of the proposal would jar with the modest lean-to extension and otherwise plain and simple rear of the appeal property, and the wider terraced blocks whilst introducing a further, distinct and competing built element. Together with the previous extension, the proposal would result in incremental rearward sprawl into the compact rear yard areas.
 8. As a clearly incremental addition, the proposal would reflect neither the form, proportions nor general character of the host building. And whilst it would not extend across the whole width of the property's rear elevation, it would nonetheless dominate it by virtue of its still not inconsiderable width and incongruously boxy form.
 9. I accept that, based upon the agreed photographic evidence, the extension would barely be visible from the roadside. Within rear gardens, the intervening garden fences would also partly screen the flat roofed extension in ground level views along the rear of St Lawrence Cottages. This would reduce its prominence in ground level views. However, the extension's incongruously boxy form would be readily evident in more elevated views along the rear of the terrace from neighbouring and nearby properties, where it would clearly appear as an incremental rearward sprawl at odds with the more simple and compact form and layout of properties within the two terraced blocks.
 10. Policy S.DH1 of the Tower Hamlets Local Plan (THLP) seeks to deliver high quality design. It expects proposals to respect and positively respond to, amongst other things, context, local distinctiveness and character and, to achieve this, development must be of an appropriate scale, mass, bulk and form in its site and context. For the reasons I have set out above, the proposal would fail to do so and is therefore contrary to THLP policy S.DH1.
 11. THLP Policy S.DH3 states that proposals must preserve or, where appropriate, enhance designated and non-designated heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance. Although the Council has not provided any evidence regarding the significance of the non-designated heritage asset, nor has the appellant disputed the Council's description of St Lawrence Cottages as early examples of Council housing or that they retain a degree of consistency and historic character in amongst the modern development which surrounds the site.
 12. From the evidence agreed between the main parties, St Lawrence Cottages have a distinctive, if somewhat incongruous, presence amongst the looming, modern high-rise developments that surround them. The significance of the relative simplicity, broad consistency, limited interventions and overall character of St Lawrence Cottages assumes greater importance in this context. The proposed extension would compromise the compact nature and simplicity of form which the evidence demonstrates is present at St Lawrence Cottages, and which No. 4 contributes to. The proposal would not, for the reasons I have set out, be appropriate in terms of design or form and would fail to preserve or enhance the character of appearance of the host building or St Lawrence

Cottages as a whole. The proposal would, as a consequence, fail to accord with THLP policy S.DH3.

Other Matters

13. The appeal property is occupied as a house in multiple occupation (HMO) and the proposed extension would, the appellant states, provide an enlarged kitchen / dining / living area and increase the distance from kitchen to the nearest bedroom to the overall benefit of occupiers of the property. Whilst the appellant's desire to provide improved living accommodation is noted there is no suggestion that the property's current layout fails to provide adequate living conditions. The proposal's extended communal living area may make the property more desirable to occupiers but in the absence of evidence to demonstrate that the appeal property does not currently provide adequate living conditions, I give this matter only limited weight in support. That weight is insufficient to outweigh the harm to character and appearance that I have identified above.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons set out, and having considered all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Graeme Robbie

INSPECTOR