



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 September 2020

by B Davies MSc FGS CGeol

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/F5540/W/20/3252995

41 Sonia Gardens, Hounslow, TW5 0LZ

- 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 K Sandhu against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hounslow.
 - The application Ref 01027/41/P1, dated 24 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 25 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is two self-contained flats.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. It has been necessary to change the description of the development from that on the application form to remove the word 'retention', which is not a description of development.

Main issues

3. The main issues are:
 - Whether or not the building is suitable for conversion having regard to local policies on sustainable mixed communities.
 - The living conditions of occupiers of the flats, having regard to internal and external space.
 - Whether or not there is adequate provision for storage of refuse and bicycles.
 - The effect of the proposal on highway safety.

Reasons

Suitability for conversion

4. The property was originally a terraced house, converted to 2 flats which the appellant has applied to retain.
5. Policy SC6 of the London Borough of Hounslow Local Plan (2015-2030)('LP') requires that at least one family-sized unit is provided at ground floor level in any residential conversion, where this is defined as a minimum of two

bedrooms for four people. The ground floor flat has only one bedroom and is therefore not large enough to qualify as family-sized accommodation.

6. I have noted the differing opinions regarding the need for family dwellings locally. The Council are clear that there is a need for family housing in the area and that this location is suitable for such development, and I have nothing substantial before me to demonstrate that the weight given to this aspect of the policy should be lessened. The loss of family-sized accommodation will therefore be harmful to the local mix of housing and in conflict with Policy SC6.
7. Policy SC6 states that for a building to be suitable for conversion the original internal floor area must be at least 130 m². The Council has calculated that the original floor area of the property was 97 m² and therefore substantially below this threshold. It is not in dispute that it is possible to convert houses with a smaller footprint, but the Council have clearly justified this threshold based on the standard of internal space required to maintain the good quality of accommodation in the borough. Given the significant shortfall in the original floor area I therefore consider that the development will lead to a standard of living that would not be consistent with the aims of Policy SC6.
8. The appellant cites the Council's intention to build housing faster than the targets set out in the London Plan and suggests that a restriction on the size of houses is not consistent with this objective. However, while house building is undoubtedly a national priority, this must be in the context of maintaining a good standard of living for occupants.
9. It has been drawn to my attention that other houses in the cul-de-sac have been subdivided. However, details of these conversions are not before me and regardless, each case must be decided on its own merits.
10. The development will harm the suburban character of the area and lead to loss of family sized accommodation. This conflicts with local policies SC5 and SC6, which together aim to preserve local character and ensure an appropriate mix of housing.

Living conditions

11. Flat B has access to approximately 10 m² of private outdoor space on a first-floor balcony. The guidelines in Policy SC5 recommend that the occupants should have access to an additional 15 m² of communal space to meet the demands of everyday life. The development does not therefore meet the requirements of this policy.
12. I appreciate that the limited outdoor space provided may not in itself be intrinsically harmful. However, the policy requirement reflects the aims of the Council to maintain the open, outer suburban nature of the borough and associated high standard of living, which would therefore be harmed by the urbanising effects of a very small external amenity space.
13. The Gross Internal Area of Flat A is 35 m², which is only slightly short of the recommended minimum of 37 m² in the Nationally Described Space Standard (March 2015), referenced by Policy SC5. Allowing for the space provided by the large rear garden, I do not consider that this shortfall will be harmful to living conditions.

14. The outdoor amenity space for Flat B is significantly smaller than the minimum recommended in the local plan and would cause harm to the living conditions of the occupants in the context of the suburban nature of the area, in conflict with Policy SC5.

Space for storage of refuse and bicycles

15. Policy SC6 requires that development includes provision for the storage of waste and recycling. The Council have also recommended that the development provides space for at least 3 bicycles based on Policy EC2, which should be fully enclosed, sheltered and conveniently located.
16. At the site visit I noted that the refuse bins were neatly arranged immediately in front of the house, but I did not observe any facilities for a bike rack. It was not clear that both refuse and bicycle storage could be housed on the small area of hardstanding remaining once a car has been parked on the space. In the absence of plans, I therefore cannot be confident that the requirements of Policies EC2 and SC6 can be met.

Highway safety

17. The site has one parking space in front of the house, which was observed to be in use at the site visit. The development adds one small household, and, although mindful that it is not appropriate to specify a minimum of spaces at this location as per the London Plan, I concur with the Council that it is reasonable to consider that 2 cars could be needed.
18. There is no remaining space outside the development. However, there was off street parking available at the time of the visit, and although this was limited it was unrestricted by yellow lines or permits. I am therefore satisfied that an additional car could be accommodated locally, if needed, without an adverse impact on the transport network and that there would be no harm to the safety of traffic and pedestrians, in line with the requirements of Policy EC2

Planning balance

19. The proposal would create two flats from a single house, but given the small size of the development, the benefits from this would be limited.
20. The benefits from additional accommodation and a lack of harm in respect of highway safety do not outweigh the harm to the mix of housing and living conditions, and from the potential lack of storage for both refuse and bicycles.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons above, and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal should be dismissed.

B Davies,

INSPECTOR