
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 October 2020

by Gary Deane BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 October 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/X5990/W/20/3249793

Joanne House, Queensborough Mews, London W2 3SF

- 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 the Urban Airspace Group against the decision of the City of Westminster Council.
 - The application Ref 19/08451/FULL, dated 30 October 2019, was refused by notice dated 11 February 2020.
 - The development proposed is a roof development to create 2 residential units.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matter

2. The Officer's report notes that objectors have raised concern about the accuracy of the drawings. My assessment of the proposal is based on all of the evidence before me and an inspection of the site and its surroundings. Like the Council, I am satisfied that the details of the proposal as shown on the drawings and detailed in the written evidence allow a reasonable assessment of the development sought.

Main issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development firstly, on the character and appearance of the appeal building and the Bayswater Conservation Area; and secondly, on the living conditions of the occupiers of 30 and 32 Porchester Terrace with particular regard to sense of enclosure.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. Joanne House is an unassuming 4-storey residential block that dates from the mid 20th Century that lies within the Bayswater Conservation Area (CA). The CA derives its significance as a designated heritage asset primarily from the regular composition of streets and squares and the number and variety of high quality historic buildings, which positively contribute to many fine streetscapes.
5. The appeal building is not listed nor does it have any strong architectural or aesthetic qualities. It is unmistakably a block of flats that purely in itself neither adds nor detracts from the character and appearance of the CA. The appeal building therefore has a neutral effect on this heritage asset.

6. From the evidence before me, Joanne House does, however, fall within a historic area of mews situated between Porchester and Queensborough Terraces. While this area has clearly changed over time and existing properties vary in their build lines, scale, height and roof treatments, a unifying feature is that buildings are generally modest in scale and height and laid out in an intimate pattern with narrow streets that are shared by users. This arrangement contrasts with the surrounding terraces along which buildings are generally taller, more substantial in built form and face onto wider and busier roads. The notable difference in scale, layout and ambiance between these adjacent areas adds to the character of the CA. It exemplifies some of features of mews, to which the Conservation Area Audit No 6: Bayswater (CAA) and both main parties have referred. In that context, Joanne House belongs to an area that positively contributes to the character and qualities of the CA.
7. The proposal is to extend the appeal building upwards to provide 2 additional flats at a new fifth floor level. The new addition would be simple in design and modern in style. The use of standing seam zinc cladding or a similar material would complement the appearance and texture of the brick and render below and add some visual interest to the finished building. The large glazed units to the west and east elevations would also support the contemporary twist given by the choice of materials to the appearance of the host building.
8. Even so, the proposal would be a significant built addition at a high level on the building, which would be evident from various locations. From Queensborough Terrace, the proposed extended building would be even taller than the buildings on either side. From both Fulton Mews and Queensborough Mews, it would draw the eye as being significantly larger. That the new south elevation would present a blank wall save for a window towards one corner would visually accentuate the bulk of the proposal and the height and depth of the finished building. As a result, Joanne House would become highly conspicuous in the group to which it belongs and it would gain prominence in the street scenes. While some views of the extension from Queensborough Terrace would be filtered through the canopies of roadside trees, the screening effect would be far less effective in winter months after leaf fall.
9. Although the design, styles and height of buildings within the group of which Joanne House forms part and along Queensborough Terrace varies the proposed development would jar with the otherwise relatively low profile and modest scale of development within the immediate area, which is an important aspect of its character. Having carefully considered the appellant's Heritage Appeal Statement and the historical analysis of the local area, and recognising that the area has evolved with building alterations, extensions and replacements made over time, I find that the proposal would be an unwelcome addition to the CA. It would be a discordant element and obtrusive even among the varied built form with which the extension would be visually 'read'. The main outcome would be material harm to the character and appearance of the CA, which would fail to be preserved.
10. In reaching this conclusion, I note that a detached building referred to as Church House, previously occupied part of the site and that it stood taller than those around it. However, that building differed in design and size to Joanne House and its current context, which forms the basis of my assessment. I also agree that the enlarged building would not visually compete with the taller and larger buildings on the opposite side of Queensborough Terrace to the site.

11. The Council and others raise additional concern that the proposal would relate awkwardly to the existing roof profile of Joanne House which has a pitched slope towards one end and that it would unbalance the proportions of the host building and appear 'top heavy'. To my mind, it would be a proportionate addition and its largely set back position would enable the new extension to relate appropriately to the roof of the host building in design terms.
12. In this case, the harm resulting from the proposal on the significance of the CA would be less than substantial. In those circumstances, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The proposal would provide support to the local economy especially during the construction phase. Once complete, it would add to the supply and choice of residential accommodation. However, these benefits do not outweigh the harm that I have identified.
13. On the main issue, I therefore conclude that the proposed development would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the local area. As such, it is contrary to Policies S25 and S28 of Westminster's City Plan and Policies DES 1, DES 6, DES 9 and paragraphs 10.108 to 10.128 of the Westminster Unitary Development Plan. Taken together, these policies broadly aim to ensure that new development achieves a high standard of design, safeguards heritage assets and respects local context and character.
14. There would also be a conflict with the Framework, which states that heritage assets should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. The proposal would also be at odds with the statutory duty, which requires that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Living conditions

15. The proposal would be visible directly from several properties around Joanne House including the rears of 30 and 32 Porchester Terrace, which back onto the site. From this direction, Joanne House would be noticeably taller and larger with the new built form in place. Even so, the completed building would be no closer to these and other buildings surrounding the site and the view from the rear windows of Nos 30 and 32 across their back gardens would still be dominated by the appeal building. While the skyward view from these properties would be diminished to some extent by the extension, the overall effect would not be so great as to unduly heighten a sense of enclosure for the occupiers of Nos 30 and 32.
16. On the second main issue, I conclude that the proposed development would not materially reduce the living conditions of the occupiers of No 30 or 32. As such, it does not conflict with the policies cited by the Council in the second reason for refusal insofar as they aim to safeguard residential amenity. My favourable finding on this matter does not outweigh the significant harm that I have identified in relation to the first main issue.

Other matters

17. The proposed accommodation would exceed relevant minimum space standards. A sedum roof finish and photovoltaic panels would support the green credentials of the appeal scheme. However, these considerations do not outweigh the significant harm that I have identified.

18. Interested parties raise several additional concerns including light, privacy, access, on-street parking, security and the potential noise and disturbance during the construction phase. These are all important matters and I have taken into account all of the evidence before me. However, given my findings on the first main issue, these are not matters on which my decision has turned.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Gary Deane

INSPECTOR