



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 13 October 2020

by William Cooper BA (Hons) MA CMLI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19th November 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Y1945/D/20/3255519

31 Aldenham Road, Watford WD19 4AB

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mrs Claire Bradley against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application 19/01399/FULH dated 25 November 2019, was refused by notice dated 27 May 2020.
 - The development proposed is described as replacing UPVC windows with sliding sash style UPVC windows; removing cladding from front elevation and exposing brick work, or if the brick work proves to be damaged rendering; and replacing the concrete tiles on the roof with slate effect tiles, and as part of this installing a rear dormer.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the character or appearance of the Oxhey Conservation Area (CA) would be preserved or enhanced.

Reasons

3. The CA covers a residential area to the east of the railway line which serves Bushey station. The CA comprises a number of streets which lead off from the Villiers Road axis. Two-storey brick buildings with pitched roofs predominate. Judging by what I saw during my site visit and the Oxhey Conservation Area Character Appraisal, the CA's significance lies in its illustration of the architectural evolution of the residential suburb from the mid-nineteenth century, through the Victorian railway era. Its character is shaped by its variety of Victorian architecture, including terraced housing, detached and semi-detached villas, public houses and shops. Small scale roofscapes and streetscapes are important elements of this architectural character.
4. The appeal building is located in the north-western corner of the CA, facing onto Aldenham Road. It is a two-storey brick end terrace dwelling with a pitched roof. It is situated at the south-western end of a row which has the name stone 'St Helena Cottages'.
5. Sight lines across the separation gap between the gable ends of the appeal building and the next terraced row beginning at No 23 contribute to the prominence of the appeal building, and the visibility of its front elevation and south-western gable end profile, viewed from the street. The location of the site on a street which is a pedestrian route to and from the nearby train station and businesses around the junction with the A4008 adds to its prominence.

6. Within this context, the appeal building contributes positively to the significance of the CA through its traditional architectural identity as part of a Victorian terraced 'cottage row' within the Oxhey 'village' suburb.
7. The proposed change of style of uPVC front windows to sliding sash would be more in keeping with the CA than the existing windows. Albeit more historically authentic timber-framed sash windows would not be used.
8. It is proposed to remove the render on the building's front elevation to expose the brickwork or, if the brickwork were revealed to be damaged, apply a smooth white render using a lime-based mortar. This element of the proposal would be more sympathetic to the building's Victorian architecture than the existing finish.
9. Replacement of the building's concrete roof tiles is proposed. Replacement with slate roofing would be sympathetic to the heritage character and appearance of the CA. However, there is ambiguity in the application's description of proposed replacement roofing material. Section 5 of the application form describes the proposed materials for the main roof and cladding of the proposed dormer as 'slate/slate effect' tiles. This indicates the possibility of material other than slate being used, the authenticity and longevity of which is not demonstrated. Therefore, preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of the CA is not conclusively shown in this respect.
10. The width of the proposed dormer would stretch across the full width of the rear roof slope, and the dormer's roof would be set only marginally below the dwelling's ridge. This would be within the context of the roofscape of the Victorian terraced host row being free from dormers. Moreover, while noting several dormers elsewhere in the CA as cited by the appellant, from what I saw during my site visit, the prevailing impression in the CA is of original roof profiles mostly free from dormers.
11. Around two fifths of the rear main roof slope would remain visible. However, given its width, bulk and elevated position on the upper part of the main roof, the proposed dormer would overdominate the host building and visually unbalance the host terraced row. This would draw attention to the modernity of the proposed dormer's profile and mass and erode the architectural identity of the Victorian terraced cottage row. This would be incongruous and obtrusive to the character and appearance of the CA.
12. The above effects would be noticeable, to various degrees, from the following combination of viewpoints: to pedestrians along the street on Aldenham Road, approaching from the south-west; from the rear garden of the appeal dwelling and from neighbouring properties to each side.
13. As such, the proposal would not accord with the guidance in paragraph 8.3.1 of the Watford Residential Design Guide (Amended 2016), which specifies that an extension's roof form should complement neighbouring roof forms.
14. The positive effects of the proposed changes to the front elevation - and even allowing for a positive roofing effect, were the materials description to be less ambiguous - would not override the adverse impact of the proposed dormer on the character and appearance of the CA.
15. I recognise that on the approach to the junction with the A4008, the south-western end of Aldenham Road, inside and outside the CA, contains some more

modern development, in addition to the substantial presence of Victorian architecture. I note that in the emerging new Local Plan an area of land on the other side of Aldenham Road, outside the CA, has a draft Strategic Development Area designation to encourage medium to high density mixed use development. I also note that concern about pressure on the CA's traditional character and appearance was apparently a stimulus to its designation as a CA in 2013.

16. Nevertheless, the above considerations do not diminish the identified heritage value and character of the CA, including the stretch of the south-eastern side of Aldenham Road where the appeal building is located. Furthermore, more modern development in the area would not override the importance of development being sympathetic to its heritage context.
17. The identified harm arising from the proposal would be significant, relative to the site and the immediate surroundings of the proposal in the CA. However, the effect would be localised and therefore would constitute less than substantial harm to the significance of the CA as a whole. In such circumstances I therefore necessarily weigh the harm against the public benefits of the proposal.
18. With regard to the above, the proposal would provide additional family living space in the appeal dwelling. The following elements of the proposal would also improve the character and appearance of the appeal building, in heritage terms, compared to its existing treatment. The sliding sash windows in the front elevation would be more in keeping with the CA than the existing windows. Exposing the brickwork or replacing the more modern render with a lime-based finish would be more sympathetic than the existing materiality. Were a slate roof to be installed, this would be more sympathetic than the existing concrete tiles
19. However, the public benefits are limited by the scale of the proposed development. Furthermore, they are tempered by the consideration that the proposal would not take the opportunity to use more authentic heritage material in the form of timber framed windows, and there is ambiguity around the possibility of non-slate roofing, the authenticity and longevity of which is not demonstrated.
20. Consequently, the public benefits do not outweigh the great weight given to the conservation of CA and the less than substantial harm to its significance which I have identified.
21. To conclude, the proposed development would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA. As such it would conflict with Policies UD1 and UD2 of Watford's Local Plan Part 1 - Core Strategy 2006-31 (2013) and Saved Policy U18 of the Watford District Plan (2000) (DP). Together the policies seek to ensure that development is of appropriate design and appearance to conserve or enhance local character and the historic environment. The policies are broadly consistent with the approach of the National Planning Policy Framework in respect of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, with great weight given to the asset's conservation.
22. Policy U17 of the DP covers development adjacent to a CA. As the proposal is within the CA, this policy is not engaged in this case.

Conclusion

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

William Cooper

INSPECTOR