
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 November 2020

by R C Shrimplin MA(Cantab) DipArch RIBA FRTPI FCI Arb MCIL

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 January 2021

Appeal Reference: APP/K2230/D/20/3250515

Land at 53 Barr Road, Gravesend DA12 4DU

- 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 and Mrs S James against the decision of Gravesham Borough Council.
 - The application (reference 20200003, dated 31 December 2020) was refused by notice dated 3 March 2020.
 - The development proposed is described in the application form as “proposed demolition of side garage / storage and constructing of single-storey rear extension and double side and rear extension including loft conversion and a dormer at the rear”.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for “proposed demolition of side garage / storage and constructing of single-storey rear extension and double side and rear extension including loft conversion and a dormer at the rear”, at 53 Barr Road, Gravesend DA12 4DU, in accordance with the terms of the application (reference 20200003, dated 31 December 2020), subject to the following conditions.
 1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this decision.
 2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved drawings:
 - drawing number PL10 (Existing Plans & Elevations);
 - drawing number PL11A (Proposed Floor Plans);
 - drawing number PL12A (3D Views);
 - drawing number PL13A (Block Plan & Location Plan).
 3. The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building.

Main issues

2. There are three main issues to be determined in this appeal. The first is the effect of the proposed development on the character of the host building and its surroundings. The second is whether the scheme would provide satisfactory living conditions for occupiers of the proposed new residential accommodation.

The third is the effect of the proposed development on the residential amenities of neighbours (whether unacceptable harm would be caused by overbearing appearance or overshadowing).

Reasons

3. The appeal site is situated in an established residential area of Gravesend, which is characterised by traditional homes in a more or less geometric layout. The houses are generally arranged in terraces, of two storeys, with pitched roofs.
4. The properties in Barr Road benefit from modest front gardens that, in a number of cases, have been put to use for off-street parking and there is obvious parking pressure along the road. Even so, the plots have long back gardens that can be reached by means of a driveway running between the back gardens of the houses in Barr Road and the back gardens of the houses in Rochester Road, which is roughly parallel to Barr Road. The driveway itself is almost continuously lined with garages or other outbuildings that serve the properties on either side.
5. Number 53 Barr Road is located at the end of a terrace of similar two-storey houses. Like its neighbours it has projecting bays and other architectural features and is finished externally with rendering and vertical tiling, in part. It has a hipped roof, at the end of the terrace, and is separated from the next terrace by a gap that provides access to a garage which is set back from the front of the house. The adjoining building on this side is built up to its side boundary, however, and it has a gable-ended roof that dominates the gap between the terraces.
6. In September 2019, a lawful development certificate was granted by the Council, for the construction of a dormer extension to the rear roof slope of number 53 Barr Road, incorporating a "hip to gable roof alteration". Now, however, a more substantial scheme is proposed, incorporating extensions at first floor and ground floor levels (replacing existing structures at the rear), as well as a roof conversion. The appeal scheme would also involve the removal of the garage at the side of the house and the construction of a side extension into the space between the ends of the two terraces.
7. The 'National Planning Policy Framework' (which was revised in February 2019) emphasises the aim of "achieving well designed places" in the broadest sense (notably at Section 12), while making effective use of land and encouraging economic activity. It is aimed at achieving good design standards generally, which includes protecting existing residential amenities and providing good standards of accommodation.
8. At the same time, of course, the NPPF acknowledges that modern design can have a role to play in creating a contemporary townscape, for example at paragraph 126, which states that planning policies "should allow a suitable degree of variety where this would be justified".
9. An emphasis on the importance of good design and a recognition that contemporary design can be acceptable is also to be found in the Development Plan. Attention has been drawn to Policy CS19 of the 'Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy' (adopted in September 2014). Policy CS19 identifies the

Council's aim to "conserve and enhance the character of the local built, historic and natural environment" and it also points out the importance of safeguarding the amenities of future occupants, among other things.

10. The proposed extensions would include a roof conversion, creating habitable space on the second floor, a rearward projection of 3 metres (as dimensioned) for part of the first floor and a rearward projection of 6 metres (as dimensioned) across the width of the ground floor. At each level, the width of the existing building would be increased, encroaching into the space between number 53 and its neighbour at number 55 (to the east).
11. The traditional appearance of the front elevation would be largely maintained by the proposals, although there would be some changes to the design of the windows and the front door. In addition, rooflights would be installed on the front slope of the main roof and the street elevation would be increased in width, although the additional section would be set back from the front of the original building, thus preserving its essential architectural character. Although the gap between the ends of the separate terraces would be reduced, this reduction would not be so significant as to alter the basic character of the frontage. Hence, the proposals would have only a very limited impact on the streetscene in Barr Road.
12. At the rear of the property, the impact of the proposals would be very different. The materials to be used for the walls and roof (render and tiling) would match those of the existing building but they would be used to create a very different effect. The extensions at each level would be constructed with flat roofs, creating a tiered design that would have a strikingly modern character at the rear of this part of the terrace.
13. The rear elevation of the terrace is difficult to see from the drive that runs along the back of the properties, since the garages and outbuildings that line the drive at the ends of the back gardens largely obscure the views, even though the rear elevation is visible intermittently. On the other hand, of course, the rear elevations of the houses are clearly visible from nearby back gardens, which fall away from the terrace.
14. Nevertheless, the rear view of the terrace is somewhat bland and is not particularly sensitive in architectural terms. In these circumstances, the introduction of a bold modernistic element at the appeal site would not cause unacceptable harm to the appearance of the host building (the terrace) or to its surroundings, in planning terms.
15. Turning to the quality of the proposed accommodation itself, it has been pointed out that certain of the new rooms would be rather small. Apart from the generous living accommodation on the ground floor, the plans of the proposals show that the finished house would have three bedrooms of a reasonable size as well as two much smaller rooms. These are also marked as "bedrooms" on the plans of the first and second floors. Currently, the house has two larger bedrooms but one room on the first floor that is, likewise, rather small. The small room of the proposed second floor would have a partially sloping ceiling, further reducing its usefulness.
16. Of course, the labelling of the rooms on the plan cannot guarantee what their future use might be; in practice, a small room could be useful as an additional

study or box room, for example. Nor would it be reasonable to attempt to control the day to day use of individual rooms by the imposition of conditions. In this case, the quality and extent of the proposed accommodation would be greater than that of the existing house and the finished house would achieve a good standard of accommodation overall, with various living areas and three substantial bedrooms. In short, I have formed the opinion that the scheme as a whole would provide a reasonable standard of accommodation for future occupants.

17. Although the reasons given by the local planning authority for refusing the planning application do not specifically identify an objection that is based on the impact of the project on its immediate neighbours, such a concern is raised more clearly in the submissions.
18. The proposed extension would project beyond the main rear wall of the terrace by 6 metres and its flank wall would be a relatively high wall on the boundary. Thus, to some degree, it would have an adverse effect on the light available at the rear of number 51 and it would restrict the outlook. Nevertheless, many of the houses in this part of Barr Road have been extended at the rear to a greater or lesser extent and, as has been noted, they have long gardens, by modern standards, which provide an open setting. On balance, therefore, I have concluded that the effect on the neighbour would not be unduly harmful in planning terms, bearing in mind the character of the surroundings and the orientation of the terrace, of which the rear elevation faces northwards, very approximately.
19. The house at number 55 has previously been extended up to its boundary, thereby imposing itself on the outlook from the appeal site. On this side, the proposed rear extension at number 53 would include a two-storey element but it would be set back from its side boundary and much of the new construction would be alongside the blank flank wall of its neighbour. The extension would not have a material impact on natural light at number 55 and the impact on outlook would only be limited. Again, therefore, I have concluded that the effect of the appeal proposals on the neighbour's living conditions does not justify a refusal of planning permission.
20. Evidently, the appeal site lies within an established urban area, which is "sustainable" in planning terms, and the proposed extension would be a useful addition to the accommodation at 53 Barr Road. The contribution that the appeal scheme would make to the provision of residential accommodation in the locality, even though it would be limited, weighs in favour of the appeal. I have formed the view that, in the circumstances of this particular site, the scheme would not cause undue harm to the architectural qualities of the host building or to the character and appearance of the surroundings. Moreover, I have concluded that the finished house would provide a satisfactory standard of accommodation for future occupants and that the rearward extensions would not cause unacceptable harm to the living conditions of neighbours on either side.
21. Hence, I have also concluded that the project would not be in conflict with the Development Plan, in principle, including Policy CS19 of the 'Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy'. In short, I am persuaded that the scheme before me can properly be permitted, subject to conditions, and although I have considered all

the matters that have been raised in the representations I have found nothing to cause me to alter my decision.

22. I have, however, also considered the need for conditions and, in imposing conditions, I have taken account of the conditions suggested by the Council in the usual way (without prejudice to their main arguments in the appeal). I have concluded that conditions are necessary, to define the planning permission and to ensure that quality is maintained, both in respect of the new building itself and the landscaping of the site.

Roger C Shrimplin

INSPECTOR