



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 March 2021

by Alison Scott BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6 April 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/E5330/W/20/3261279

Ascension Vicarage, Thornhill Avenue, Plumstead SE18 2HS

- 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 Pard Thandi against the decision of The Royal Borough of Greenwich Council.
 - The application Ref 20/1735/F, dated 12 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 28 August 2020.
 - The development proposed is an 8-unit residential development comprising: 5 no. 2B/4P apartments, 1 no. 2B/3P apartment, 1 no. 1B/2P apartment and 1 no. 1B/2P studio apartment with associated amenity.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. Since the time the appeal was submitted, the Mayor of London has published the London Plan 2021 on 2 March 2021 and this replaces the London Plan 2016. The London Plan policies referred to within the Council's reason for refusal have therefore been replaced by those of the new plan. Both parties have been asked for comments regarding the new plan and therefore I am satisfied that neither parties have been prejudiced as a consequence.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on:
 - The character and appearance of the area; and
 - The living conditions of the future occupiers with regard to internal ceiling heights and daylight levels.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The area is residential in character and densely built up. The local primary school and Church of Ascension are located on two corners of the cross-roads. The appeal site is located on the opposite corner from the church and is a former vicarage.

5. The appeal building stands apart from the neighbouring modest semi-detached dwellings. It features different design characteristics, with influences from the arts and crafts style, and is a larger and more imposing dwelling.
6. A considerable amount of development is proposed to the appeal property, with some demolition works, extensions to all elevations and an increased ridge height to the original building.
7. As a consequence of the proposed stepped increase to the ridgeline height, the building would appear at odds with the street scene of Thornhill Avenue as the vicarage ridge line currently corresponds with the ridge line of the adjacent pairs of neighbouring semi-detached houses.
8. The proposed new extension to the front elevation would result in protrusion significantly forward of the existing building line. As it would encroach towards the public footpath in front of the site, the enlarged size would emphasise the incongruous scale of the proposal.
9. The existing rear elevation is currently highly prominent within the street scene. The corner location of the site creates a large gap between it and the boundary with the return dwellings along Ancaster Street. This gap provides pleasant clear views onto the rear elevation of its modest return element, and attractive roof design and decorative chimney stacks.
10. The large bulk of proposed side and rear extensions would significantly reduce this gap and create disproportionately large extensions in comparison to what currently exists. It would harmfully distort the original proportions of the dwelling, made more obvious given the proposed relationship with the much smaller scale nature of the adjacent dwelling of 1 Ancaster Street.
11. At present, the appeal dwelling sits comfortably within the plot, and the surrounding space with its boundaries allows the full character of the building to be appreciated. The significant masses of extensions would reduce the separation distances to the boundaries and further increase the scale of the proposal. Overall, the original character of the building would be harmfully eroded resulting in an overly dominant and visually intrusive building that would not harmonise with the street scene.
12. There are other corner developments brought to my attention by the appellant. However, these do not compare as they do not share precisely the same circumstances or characteristics as the appeal property, or its context. I apply limited weight to these examples.
13. A previous approval may have been granted at the site however this was for an outline scheme for new dwellings further to the complete demolition of the vicarage. Its layout and design is not the same proposal as the one before me even though there is a reduced number of bedrooms with this proposal. I apply limited weight to the comparison made.
14. To conclude on this main issue, the mass, scale and excessive bulk of proposed development would harmfully alter the character of the original building and the character and appearance of the street scene. It would therefore be contrary to the requirements of London Plan 2021 Policy D3 for development to respond to local distinctiveness, and the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy with Detailed Policies (2014) Policies DH1, H5, H(b) and H(c) in their combined design aims.

Living conditions

15. The proposal would comprise 8 apartments of one and two bed spaces. The internal sections submitted indicate that Unit 8 within the attic space could reach an internal ceiling height of 2.5m, and the appellant explains this would extend over a floor area of 41sq m, thus meeting the standards set out in the Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance 2016 (Housing SPG).
16. However, this unit would be created by various extensions to the building with differing roof forms, and the sections provided do not illustrate all the roof configurations to ensure the ceiling height would reach 2.5m for at least 75% of the gross internal area (GIA) to meet the standards of the Housing SPG.
17. Irrespective of the floor plans indicating 2.5m high ceiling heights would be achieved across the majority of the floor space, as per the same circumstances as Unit 8, this unit would be created by a number of extensions to the building, with a combination of roof forms. There are no internal sections provided for Unit 7.
18. The information provided fails to satisfactorily demonstrate appropriate ceiling heights would be achieved within Units 7 and 8. Even though the proposed units may exceed the sizes of the GIA standards set out in Housing SPG, due to the factors I have identified, it brings me to the conclusion that the internal standards would not lead to satisfactory living conditions for the future occupiers of these units.
19. Unit 6 would create a two-bedroom flat. One of the bedrooms would be served by virtue of a large window. The other double bedroom would be served by a very small window with the en-suite bathroom extension perpendicular to this window. The window would be located in the corner of the bedroom and would be exposed to limited levels of direct sunlight due to its orientation, and the position of the proposed adjacent extension.
20. Even though the window size might meet building regulation requirements and there may be no specific local or national guidance for window sizes, nevertheless, the proposed size would further restrict light levels from entering the room, and leads me to my overall assessment that the living conditions of future occupiers would not be satisfactory.
21. Therefore, to conclude, for the reasons of unsatisfactory internal ceiling heights and light levels into habitable rooms as I have identified, the proposal would not create satisfactory living conditions for future occupiers. It would not meet the requirements of Policy D6 of the London Plan 2021 and Policies H5 and DH1 of the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy with Detailed Policies (2014) which seek to achieve housing quality and adequate standards of housing. In addition, it would fail to meet the required standards as set out within the Housing SPG.

Other Matters

22. The appellant refers to achieving no conflict with the living conditions of local residents. However, the absence of harm in this regard is a neutral matter and neither weighs in favour of nor against the development.

23. I note the objections received to the proposal where some comments are not directly related to the reasons for refusal. However, as I am dismissing the appeal, there is no requirement to consider these objections further.

Conclusion

24. There are no material considerations that indicate the decision should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan.
25. For the reasons given above, I therefore conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

Alison Scott

INSPECTOR